OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

Retro GAMER™

AMSTRAD | COMMODORE | SEGA | NINTENDO | ATARI | SINCLAIR | NEO GEO | SONY | COIN-OP | MOBILE

Dark Forces

HOW DARON STINNETT USED THE FORCE TO CREATE HIS DOOM CLONE



Also inside

ARKANOID III | HIRED GUNS | AGENT X
SIRIUS SOFTWARE | TEKKEN 2
TOP 25 ZX81 GAMES | CLOUD MASTER

FROM POINT TO CLICK

Celebrating the genre that ushered in a new breed of storytelling



DRAGON 32
11 GAMES THAT NEED TO BE PLAYED

Your favourite games inside

Check out our interviews with Al Lowe and Ron Gilbert

Pick up Retro Gamer 138



Look at Game Gear
DOES SEGA'S 8-BIT HANDHELD STILL IMPRESS AFTER 25 YEARS?

Go to Commando
EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE SUPERB RUN-AND-GUN

Talk to Chris Sawyer
ONE OF THE PC'S GREATEST DEVELOPERS REVISITS HIS TIMELESS CLASSICS

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THE RETROBATES

BEST POINT-AND-CLICK ADVENTURE



DARRAN JONES

I'm going for *Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis*. A rousing adventure game that would have made an amazing film.
Expertise:
Juggling a beautiful wife, two gorgeous girls and an award-winning magazine
Currently playing:
Destiny
Favourite game of all time:
Strider



NICK THORPE

Broken Sword made a huge impression on me when I got my PlayStation, thanks to a compelling plot and all that voice acting!
Expertise:
Owning seven Master Systems
Currently playing:
Nine Hours, Nine Persons, Nine Doors
Favourite game of all time:
Sonic The Hedgehog



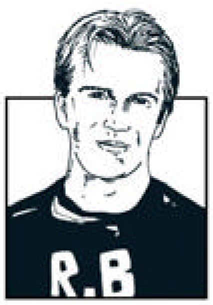
PAUL DRURY

I'm going to be hopelessly optimistic and say *Grim Fandango* – I've never played it but it's something I'm looking forward to finally giving a go on the Vita this year.
Expertise:
Tight cornering
Currently playing:
Mario Kart 8 (thanks Santa)
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



JONATHAN WELLS

Point-and-click games were a big part of my life growing up, to choose just one is a big ask…I will go with my first love. *The Secret Of Monkey Island.*
Expertise:
Tackling dirty nappies and retro spreads
Currently playing:
Destiny
Favourite game of all time:
The Secret Of Monkey Island



RICHARD BURTON

Cosmic Osmo And The Worlds Beyond The Mackerel. An oddity of a game as it's purely an adventure with no goals or inventory yet is hugely immersive and superb fun.
Expertise:
Games that load from cassette tape.
Currently playing:
Potty Pidgeon
Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner



PAUL DAVIES

D's Dining Table on Saturn if that counts? Otherwise it has to be *The Secret Of Monkey Island.*
Expertise:
Repeatedly banging my head against a brick wall
Currently playing:
Grand Theft Auto V
Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N' Ghosts



MARTYN CARROLL

The Secret Of Monkey Island. Anyone who disagrees should be subjected to stinging insults.
Expertise:
Sinclair computers, Spectrum software
Currently playing:
The Last Of Us
Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy



JASON KELK

Day Of The Tentacle kept me hooked and made me laugh more than any other point-and-click game.
Expertise:
Indie, homebrew and bedroom-coded games.
Currently playing:
Chronos
Favourite game of all time:
Io

LOADING...

I was disconnected from point-and-click adventures when they first came out. It's not that I didn't like them (far from it) it's just that I always backed the wrong computer/console, and very rarely had them in my own personal collection.

Point-and-click games were extremely rare on home consoles, meaning I'd need to get my enjoyment by popping over to a friend's house to play on their Amiga, Atari ST or PC (it paid to have lots of friends when you were younger). As a result I was able to experience many of these games as they came out and while it would take me a few extra years to grab a PC and get intimate with them, I at least saw the genre evolve.

And evolve it did, mainly due to companies like Sierra Entertainment, LucasArts, Revolution Software and Adventure Soft. These companies all made advances within the genre, bringing characters to life in new and exciting ways and finding a different way to tell stories on your favourite systems.

If you're not the biggest fan of *Monkey Island*, *Simon The Sorcerer* or *Leisure Suit Larry*, don't worry, we've plenty more for you to enjoy, including the history of the *Jedi Knight* series, in-depth guides to *Commando*, *Hired Guns* and Sirius Software and an exclusive interview with PC genius Chris Sawyer.

Enjoy the magazine!



retro GAMER

GAMING ICON

Is Yuji Naka gaming's greatest icon?

With the new generation now in full swing we felt that it was the perfect time to celebrate some of gaming's biggest icons for an exciting feature coming up soon.

Help us at **Retro Gamer** find the many important individuals who have turned our favourite pastime into one of the world's biggest forms of entertainment, so that we can give them the recognition they deserve in a future issue. Whether you believe it was Shigeru Miyamoto who refreshed the gaming landscape, or that Nolan Bushnell heralded the start of the industry as we know it, we would love to have your input. As always the best of the suggestions will appear in the magazine, so take this chance to join in on the celebrations and have your say.

You can tell us about your favourite industry veterans on the **Retro Gamer** forum, our Facebook page, or even via Twitter using **#videogameicons**.

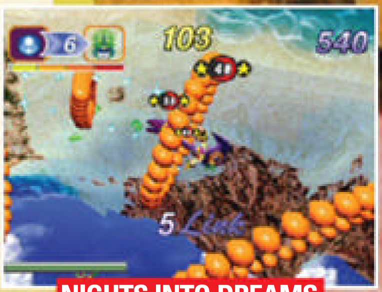
We look forward to your suggestions…



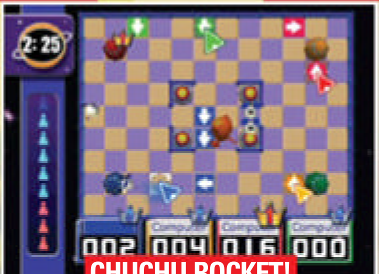
PHANTASY STAR



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG



NIGHTS INTO DREAMS



CHUCHU ROCKET!



SAMBA DE AMIGO



> **“If you’re a game creator, no matter how high a position you have in the industry, you need to keep creating. It’s better for the industry, and it’s more fun for everybody involved.”**
>
> Yuji Naka

CONTACT US NOW!

What’s your favourite Yuji Naka game? Let us know

RetroGamerUK

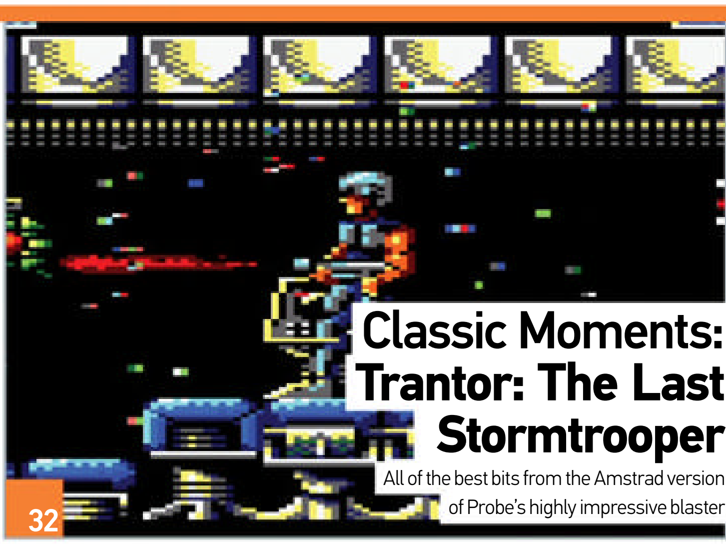
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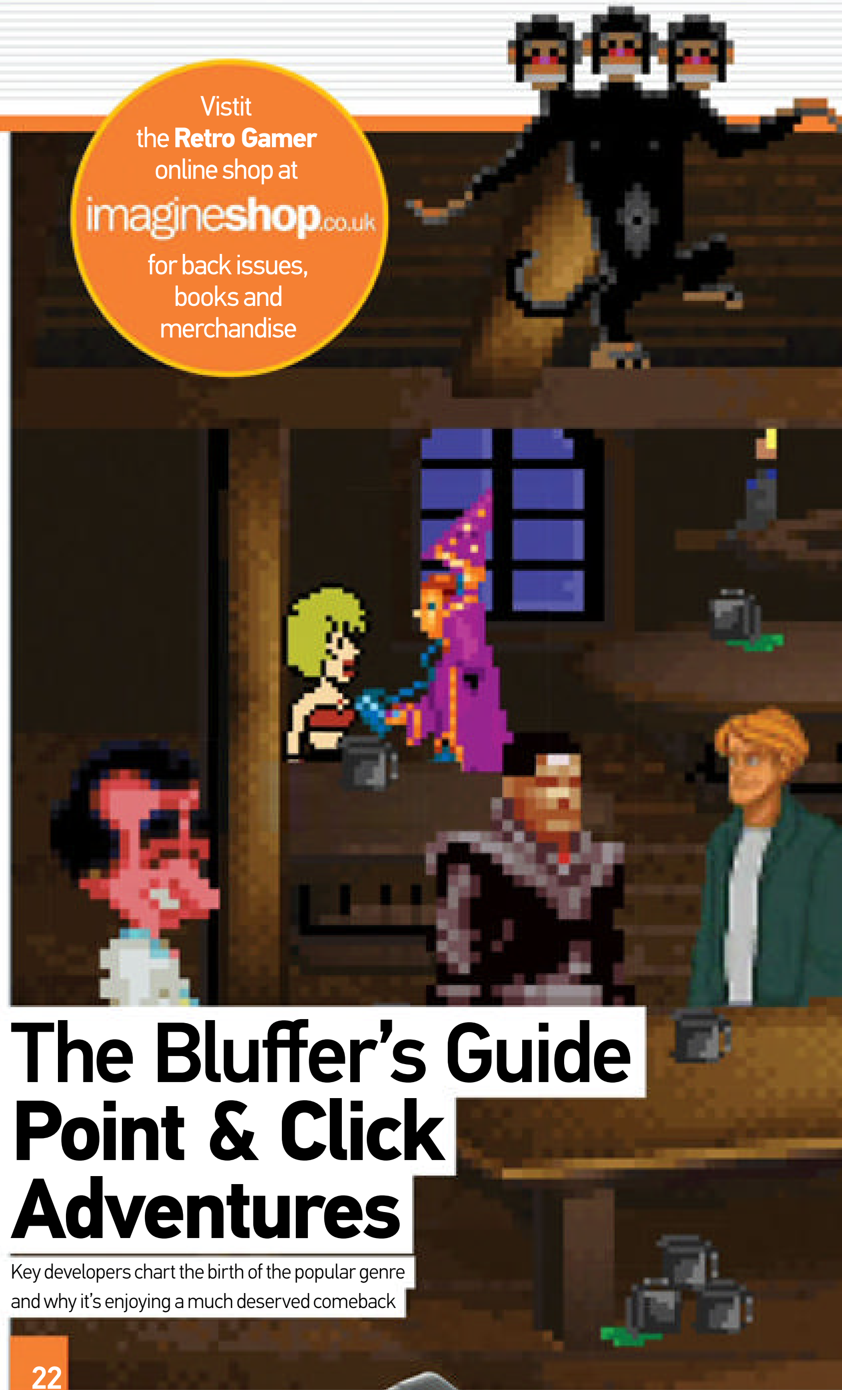
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

www.retrogamer.net/forum

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>> Load 138 Breathing new life into classic games









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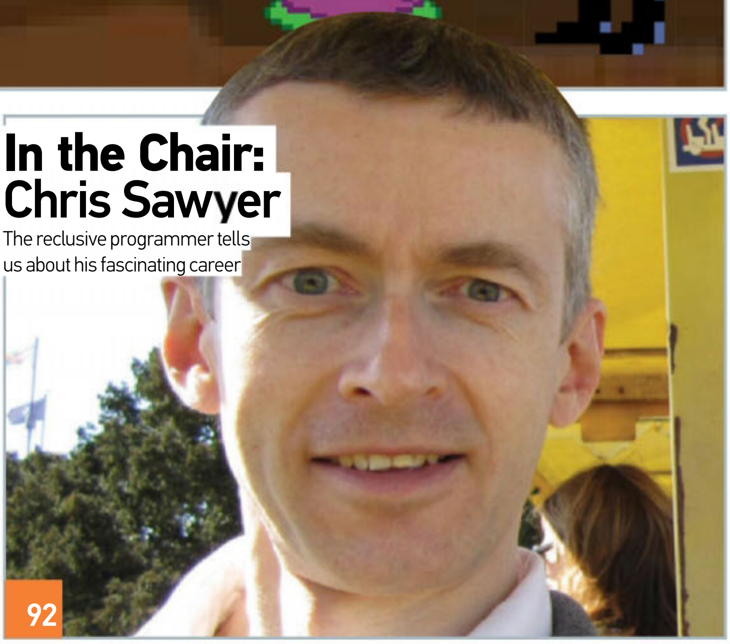






"It made it feel like we were actually contributing to the universe that we all loved"



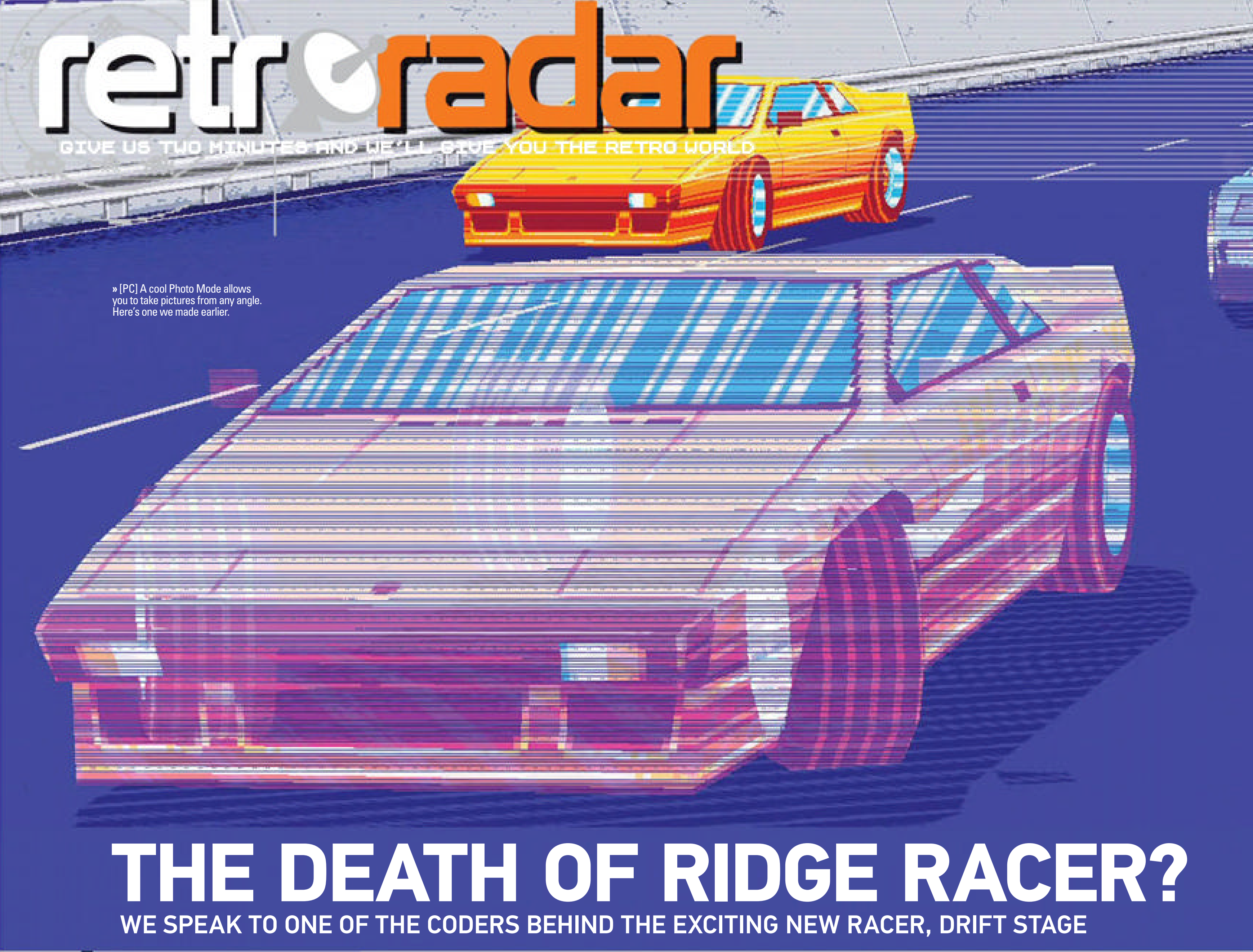


REVIEWS



ESSENTIALS





» [PC] A cool Photo Mode allows you to take pictures from any angle. Here's one we made earlier.

THE DEATH OF RIDGE RACER?

WE SPEAK TO ONE OF THE CODERS BEHIND THE EXCITING NEW RACER, DRIFT STAGE

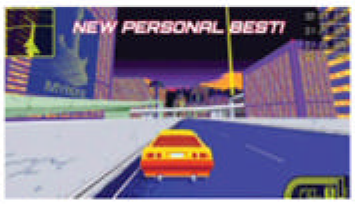
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It seems like everyone and anyone under the sun wants to make a new Kickstarter game. Indeed, it's becoming a bit of a nightmare just navigating the popular crowdfunding site, as so many developers want you to back their products.

Drift Stage is yet another Kickstarter release, but it's one that has proven to be massively popular with the internet, effortlessly sailing past its $30,000 asking pledge in under a week. It's been a pleasant surprise for Charles Blanchard, *Drift Stage*'s artist and part of the three-man team that makes up Super System Softworks. "The response to the demo and Kickstarter has been unbelievable," he tells us. "We expected it to go down to the wire, but the support of the game's fans has exceeded any of our expectations."

It's easy to see why *Drift Stage* has met its target so quickly. Unlike many other KickStarter game projects, *Drift Stage*'s promotion launched with a fully playable demo that gives an indication of just how much potential this arcade racer has. It also looks incredibly delicious with neon visuals that make it look like an Eighties racing game that's collided with a stack of Michael Bay's filters. The distinctive and vivid style came about due to Charles's desire to create something that crossed racing genres. "For the art, I wanted to make a game that captured the look and feel of a 2D racing game, but was in full 3D," he explains. "The main goal was for the games screenshots to look like 2D pixel art."

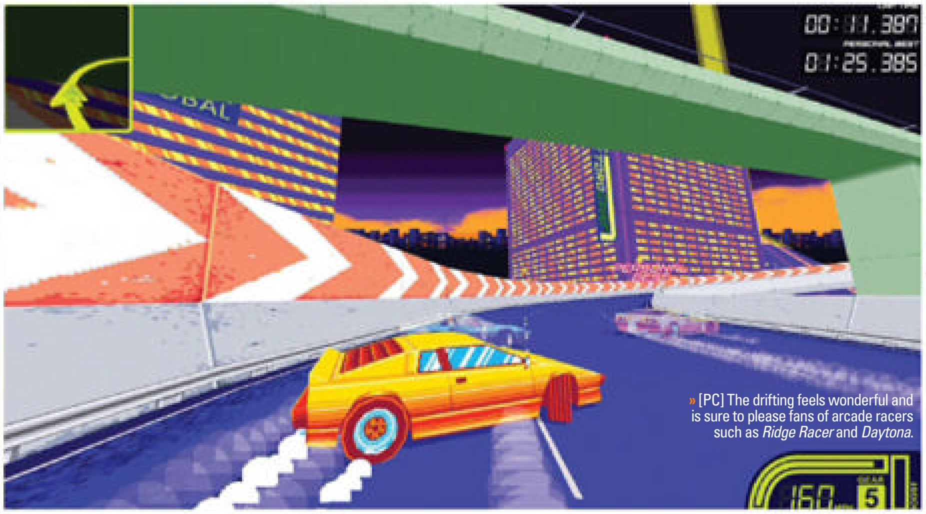
The distinctive style has paid off handsomely, for while *Drift Stage* looks a little garish in screenshots, it's a thing of absolute beauty in motion, helped by the sensible decision to have the action run at a silky smooth 60fps. "The game doesn't have any lighting or pixel shaders, so there's no reason it shouldn't run at 60fps, unless you have a very old machine," continues Charles.



» [PC] You can't hear it here but the audio is stunning.

Of course, it's all very well having a deliciously slick looking racing game, but it's no good if the core game mechanics aren't up to scratch. This is where the *Drift Stage* demo comes in as it gives a cracking indication of how the final game should stack up once it's released in late 2015. It only currently consists of a single, endlessly looping stage, but it's fantastic fun to play thanks to the excellent handling and incredibly tight track design. We spent several hours simply racing around the track time and time again, slowly improving our best time and getting to grips with the clever drift mechanics that have been based around the rather excellent *OutRun 2*.

While the drifting is the main focus of *Drift Stage*'s gameplay, the team is hoping to add other additions to ensure that the final product meets the standards of its many backers.



» [PC] The drifting feels wonderful and is sure to please fans of arcade racers such as *Ridge Racer* and *Daytona*.



» [PC] Ghosts are currently available in the demo and put up a fair challenge.



THE GREATEST GAMES EVER

» Retro Gamer needs your help to find gaming's masterpieces

■ It's been a decade since the magazine first launched and readers may remember a poll that charted the best 100 games of all time. We felt that enough time has passed to look back at the last decade of gaming and discover if opinions have changed at all over the past 10 years.

Do you still feel *Elite* is the best game you've ever played? Are you a massive fan of *R-Type* and *Double Dragon* or do you feel like recent classics such as *The Last Of Us* and *Grand Theft Auto V* should be celebrated? Perhaps *The Sims* is the pinnacle of your gaming career, or maybe it all went downhill after you discovered *The Secret Of Monkey Island* and *Sensible World Of Soccer*? Whatever you feel the best games are we want your voice to be heard, this is your magazine after all.

To join in simply send an email to **retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk** titled Greatest Games Ever. Send us your top ten personal choices and we'll do the rest. And if you want to tell us why these games made your list then let us know, we'd love to hear from you.

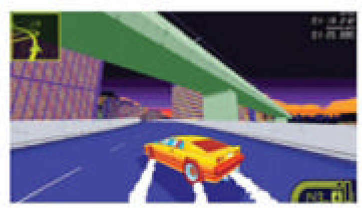
"Besides the drifting, we are looking to implement a turbo boost, and manual transmission," confirms Charles. "We have also discussed possibly having traffic in certain game modes too. We really want the gameplay to be easy to pickup and inviting."

The last point is important and it's one that the team has appeared to nail. The trio also appear to be keen to listen to feedback revealing that online leaderboards are now regarded as a "necessity". Other plans for the final product include more gameplay modes that will include: Career Mode, Daily Challenges, Work Shop and Infinite Drift. The last two sound particularly appealing, as Workshop will enable the player to create custom tracks, while Infinite Drift will involve style races on randomly generated tracks. Drift Stage will also feature a number of vehicles, all of which will handle differently to each other in the final game. Six vehicles have currently been revealed, but only the Bulldog is currently available to use in the demo. They won't be the only ones, however, with Charles telling us, "I don't have a set number in mind anymore, we will just keep adding them until the amount feels right."

> **"I wanted to make a game that captured the look and feel of a 2D racing game, but was in full 3D"**
> Charles Blanchard

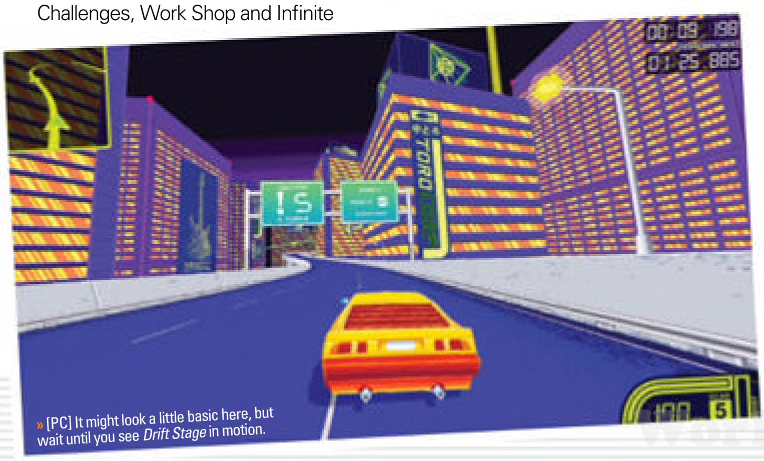
Add in some online multiplayer fun and splitscreen local play for up to four players and it is clear that Charles and the rest of the team is taking their project extremely seriously. And *Drift Stage* is certainly feeling very right at the moment. It captures all the excitement of the early arcade racing games of the Eighties and Nineties, but adds more modern handling techniques, creating a highly enjoyable experience that reminded us of the constant lap racers we'd have on the original PlayStation version of *Ridge Racer*.

» [PC] The drifting is amazingly satisfying, helped along by some truly impressive physics.



In fact, the only real fly in the ointment at the moment is that the team's current platform choice will most likely upset console owners, although all might not be lost. "We've been exploring this option," admits Charles about possible console ports, "but we're focusing on the PC versions for now."

Here's hoping that the team can sort something out. In the meantime, we strongly suggest you make your way to www.driftstagegame.com, download the excellent demo, and get a taste of what is to come. ✱



» [PC] It might look a little basic here, but wait until you see *Drift Stage* in motion.


» Justin's book promises to be the definitive guide to the cute little critters.


» *Lemmings: The Ports* originally started off as a blog about the popular franchise.

ATTACK OF THE LEMMINGS

THE DEFINITIVE LEMMINGS BOOK ARRIVES

Lemmings is one of the most popular puzzle games of all time and has been converted to an impressive range of systems over the years. No one knows this better than Justin Castle, who has decided to collate all the data he's collected across nearly a decade and place it in one single exhaustive book.

So why has Justin decided to release this rather specific tome dedicated to all things *Lemmings*? "To cut a long story short, it was to update my *Lemmings* blog but have it all in a 'finished' format (PDF or Paperback) that I no longer will need to keep updating," he tells us. "It also brings to a closure the *Lemmings* Blog that I started in 2007."

Lemmings: The Ports was originally planned to debut on Kickstarter, but Justin has now decided to 'soft launch' it on both Amazon and his own website after getting cold feet over the idea of sending out hundreds or thousands of books and perks if it hit its target. He is happy with the decision however, telling us: "at least fans got the book six months earlier than planned, so it turned out ok without too much hassle!"

And it's worth the hassle as *Lemmings: The Ports* promises to be an excellent guide to the series with interviews; examinations of every conversion; maps; sprites; unofficial ports and the numerous cancelled games. "At times I thought I would never finish it due to the amount of work that I needed to do," admits Justin, although he relished the opportunity to interview many of the people that made the *Lemings* games happen. "From growing up playing one of my favourite games in the early Nineties to talking and writing a book about its designers nearly 25 years later is pretty unique."

Lemmings: The Ports is available now from www.amazon.co.uk and www.freewebstore.org/castlebooks. We'll be looking at it next issue.



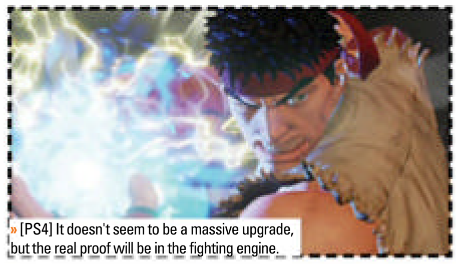
LET'S FIGHT!

STREET FIGHTER V HEADS TO PC AND PS4

Capcom has upset the apple cart by announcing that *Street Fighter V* will be released exclusively on PC and PS4.

While the idea of a new *Street Fighter* fills us with great joy, early gameplay videos suggest that it isn't going to be a massive step up from *Street Fighter IV* – in fact it looks incredibly similar. One nice new touch is the ability to knock characters into new parts of the level, similar to *Mortal Kombat* and *Dead Or Alive*, but Capcom is keeping new gameplay mechanics close to its chest.

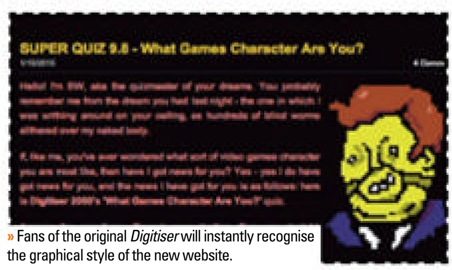
It's also unclear whether *Street Fighter V* remains a permanent PS4 exclusive, although we find this unlikely considering how many iterations of *Street Fighter IV* there were. Although Ryu and Chun-Li have been confirmed to return, Capcom is well versed in building anticipation, so expect more news to drip feed over the coming months.


» [PS4] It doesn't seem to be a massive upgrade, but the real proof will be in the fighting engine.

DIGITISER RETURNS

PAUL ROSE IS BACK IN VIDEOGAMES

If you were ever a fan of the ramblings of *Digitiser* on Teletext, you may be pleased to hear that Paul Rose, aka Mr Biffo, has resurrected it in website form. *Digitiser 2000* features all the chaotic ramblings that made the original digital magazine so popular and feels like a breath of fresh air compared to many current gaming websites. Characters like Gossi the dog have returned, and there's the possibility of crowdfunding later on in the year, which should hopefully ensure Digitiser 2000 doesn't go the same way as the Teletext original. Join in on the fun at www.digitiser2000.com.



» Fans of the original *Digitiser* will instantly recognise the graphical style of the new website.



Here's my bio… Paul Davies
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.

If OOT were OUT

What if *The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time* really isn't the greatest game of all time, like so many opinion polls have claimed? What makes a game 'the greatest game of all time' anyway?

I'm going to throw some names at you, and as a **Retro Gamer** reader, I'm certain they'll rekindle some old flames. For me, these are not also-rans to complete anybody's top 100 list but events that shook my gaming world and they are titles that I've heard talk of ever since.

Super Mario Kart (Nintendo, 1992). One 2014's Top 100 Greatest polls didn't even have this in the Top 30 let alone the Top 10. It's not that this game inspired a gazillion cut-and-paste copycats that made *Super Mario Kart* a legend; it's that this was an institution at house parties for years after its debut. You can still play *Super Mario Kart* today and have a hilarious time, with or without friends. The mechanics are amazing, the presentation is beautiful. It is eternally awesome.

Phantasy Star Online (Sonic Team, 2000). So stunning in its elegance of delivery and clarity of purpose, not until *Destiny* has anyone else managed to come within light-years of this game. Technological hurdles aside (how was this possible across a 56k modem?) the experience of completing a four-man team online to patrol planets and fight magnificent creatures was intoxicating. The in-game communication and friends system, I'm convinced, inspired what became of Xbox LIVE and later PSN. The community spirit was just wonderful. Ahhh…

Street Fighter II (Capcom, 1991). You are forgiven for not appreciating the true worth of this champion among champions only if you were born after its arrival. Everyone else, what the heck are you even voting for when it comes to earth-shattering gaming events? We played this, and played this, and played this, and played this, and played this, and… I really needed to repeat that so many times because no other coin-op faced the kind of hardcore scrutiny directed at Capcom's finest hour and lived. Its appeal was and is inexhaustible. It was fun, spectacular and transformed competitive gaming both in the arcades and at home. I'd say this is my greatest game ever, but wait there's…

Super Mario 64 (Nintendo, 1996). Things that made sense in 3D in 1995 were flight simulators, space shoot-'em-ups and racing games. The task of translating the two-dimensional antics of run-and-jump action heroes into three-dimensional space seemed forever snagged on the outer bounds of logic. Then Nintendo unveiled *Mario 64* and it was like an EMP zapped an entire entertainment industry. Now you're going to say to me: "But *Jumping Flash*!" That was a dazzling but slightly awkward puzzle game. *Mario 64* was free-running, leaping and cart-wheeling, swimming and Starman investigating liberation of our navigational senses.

These all have what it takes to become the greatest games of all time. *Zelda Ocarina Of Time* wasn't perfect. There I said it. Now I'm getting out of here. And hey I've got more, but maybe you have too? ✱



What do you think?

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK | @RetroGamer_Mag | retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk | www.retrogamer.net/forum



DISCUSS

What do you consider retro?

What We Think

■ If the below comments prove anything, it's that the term 'retro' means a great many things to a great many people. We've always used the 10-year rule in the past, as it will typically cover two generations of hardware. Worry not though, as we're unlikely to run an article on the Xbox 360 any time soon.

Forum
www.retrogamer.net/forum

■ If a game or a system is two generations behind, it's old enough to be part of a young man or woman's childhood. Retro after all is much about our youth, at least for most of us.
Nikolai

■ For me, the term 'retro' means anything that gives me that feeling of the past. Which roughly translates as 'a couple of generations back' for the most part.
The Beans

■ For me it's all about the 'bits'. 8-bit and 16-bit is retro – 32-bit is still widely used, but being overtaken by 64-bit. **Gary Plowman**

■ Whatever I was playing when I was 12. This is applicable to people of all ages.
lavalyte

■ For me I consider retro to be two generations back from the current one. So I'd class Xbox, PS2 and GameCube as retro.
Ads3

■ Two generations back unless the game has had a HD remake.
Bluce_Ree

Twitter
Twitter.com/@RetroGamer_mag

■ I'd define it as 'titles from previous gaming generations, especially those that elicit nostalgia'.
@vdono146

■ Two console generations back is good enough for me. Don't mind the varied definitions though.
@kayjoon

■ I'm struggling to define what's retro on the PC. I think if GOG have it, then it's retro.
@isofarro

■ For me it's all about the pixels (Mega Drive/SNES era). 3D games outside of the Saturn aren't quite retro enough for me.
@ash81b4u

■ It's not complicated. Retro = old and what is old is personal to each individual.
@PascalLafortune

■ I heard someone saying anything with DLC is not retro
@deanfreast

■ Anything before the year 2000.
@ash81b4u

■ Any game made for a Sega console
@RiddlerOnTwitt

Facebook
facebook.com/RetroGamerUK

■ Anything other than the current generation. So early PS3 titles are now retro.
Graz Richards

■ Anything that gives anyone a heady nostalgic trip down memory lane.
Daniel Hardy

■ In 1995, when the PlayStation launched and 16-bit computers and consoles officially died, the 'still ongoing era started' so retro is before that.
Zeid Amin Nasser

■ 'Retro' is anything eBay sellers can put a vastly inflated price on. A price usually pulled out of the ether at random.
Tom Charnock

■ Are you guys trying to start a fight or something?
Martin Harder

■ Anything where a 2D side scroller is as tech as it gets!
Pete Heseltine

■ I think saying anything other than current gen is a fair statement on paper, but just doesn't feel right in reality.
Adam Blake





Amiibo

Nintendo's answer to *Skylanders* i
properties around, and it's not hard to see why. In addition to featuring compatibility with *Mario Kart 8*, *Super Smash Bros* and future incoming games, they look absolutely lovely simply sitting on a shelf.

If we have one complaint about Nintendo's Amiibos it's that they don't integrate as well into Nintendo's ga
although it's worth noting that they also have the versatility to appear in a range of different games, which should keep their desirability level high.

The quality of the figures is also very good, with the likes of Kirby, Pikachu and Mario all looking fanta
with some of the more detailed fig
figurines. Certain ones are also getting quite hard to get hold off, with the likes of Little Mac and Wii Fit Trainer all starting to sell above their recommended retail price.

Price: £9.99 **From:**Online/retail stores

Hardcore Gaming 101 Presents: Castlevania

If you're a fan of Konami's ghoulish series you'll find this book an essential read. While it's lacking in interviews it's nonetheless packed full of fantastic content, including detailed looks at every single game in the series. Although Kurt Kalata is a big fan of the series, he never gushes, giving precise overviews of each game, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses. What really impresses with this book however is the sheer amount of fascinating facts found within it, which helps make up for the lack of developer input. A enjoyable insight into one of Konami's biggest franchises.

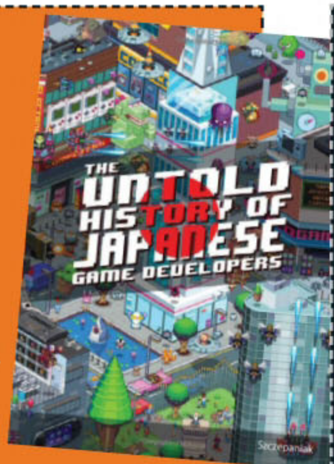
Price: £14.37/£6 (Kindle edition)
From: www.amazon.co.uk



The Untold History Of Japanese Game Developers Volume 1

If you love all things Japanese then you might want to consider this dense tome from John Szczepaniak. Originally starting off as a Kickstarter project, it covers some of Japan's most famous developers, delivering a rare insight into some of the greatest games of all time. The lack of colour photography is a little disappointing, but many will argue that the sheer amount of exclusive content more than makes up for it.

Price: £25.75/£9.24 (Kindle edition)
From: www.amazon.co.uk



Legend Of Zelda Hoodie

Keep cosy in the harsh winter months with this rather lovely official hoodie from Nintendo. Finished in gold and grey, it features a classic pose of Link in front of the equally classic *Zelda* logo. It's available in four different sizes, from small to extra large meaning that all *Zelda* fans should be able to keep nice and snug while they're out and about.
Price: £39.99 **From:** www.funstock.co.uk





Pixel Character Belt

Belts are incredibly handy, and what could be better than a belt that features all your favourite videogame icons? We can't really think of anything, but what we do know is that if we were looking for a brand new belt to hold our jeans up, it would be hard to not want one that didn't include Monty Mole, Dizzy, Mario, Frogger, Pac-Man, not to mention a whole host of other popular characters from our favourite games.

Price: £12.99
From: www.amazon.co.uk



GOD OF WAR: OMEGA COLLECTION
"This was a special release only in South America and has all five releases on Blu Ray plus a special figure. The North American release only included download codes making this rare."
PAID: £0

EVOLUTION (COLECOVISION)
"One of the first commercially available videogames designed in Canada and was co-created by Don Mattrick who has had major management positions at EA, Microsoft and Zynga."
PAID: $4

COMBAT (ATARI 2600) SIGNED BY JOE DECUIR
"Most people have no idea who Joe is but he was a pioneer at Atari who co-developed *Combat*. He was also one of the original engineers on the Amiga."
PAID: £0

EARTHBOUND (SNES)
"*Earthbound* is one of the more valuable SNES releases in complete condition because it was released in a larger box with a strategy guide, complete with scratch and sniff adverts!"
PAID: $0

APF IMAGINATION MACHINE
"This is a rare machine. It was a combination of games console and computer, and was donated anonymously to the museum."
PAID: $0

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

THAT PIECE YOU CAN'T BE WITHOUT

EXTRA TERRESTRIALS (ATARI 2600)

■ "It's one of the rarest Atari 2600 games made and estimated to have only sold a couple of hundred copies. This is the prototype cart, valued at around $10,000 with a reproduction box, and it's unique in many ways." Amazingly, this long-lost game was donated to Syd's museum and you can read the full story here: http://www.pcmuseum.ca/extraterrestrials.asp

Collectors corner

Readers take us through the retro keyhole



BIO

NAME: Syd Bolton

ESTIMATED VALUE: $650,000

MOST EVER SPENT: $128.72 *Halo 3 Legendary Edition*

FAVOURITE CONSOLE: PlayStation 2

FAVOURITE GAME: *The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time*

Like Michael Thomasson (Collectors Corner, Retro Gamer 135), Canadian Syd Bolton has enjoyed a degree of fame thanks to the hobby of videogame collecting. Firstly, in 2005, he created Canada's biggest interactive computer museum. "I opened the Personal Computer Museum in my backyard in an empty carriage house of sorts and used the best 80 computers I had collected," says Syd, "and we now have over 1000 computers!" Then, in April 2014, he appeared in the TV programme *Cottage Cheese* which focuses primarily on what people do and collect in their cottages. We aren't making this up. "The show was more popular than anticipated," smiles Syd, "they decided videogames would work as something you did indoors at the cottage."

Syd is, of course, a serious collector. In his collection sits complete sets of Sega Dreamcast, PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube and fully boxed Nintendo 64 games. "Now that I have finished my PS2 collection," he notes, "I believe I could be the only person in the world to have the entire sixth generation of console games for a region." An impressive achievement, but surely one that must have cost a pretty penny? "The most I've ever spent on one game was $129 for *Halo 3 Legendary Edition*," says Syd, "but I hate paying hundreds of dollars for a single game. I would rather buy ten more common games than one single expensive one because I tend to have a lot of luck coming across the rarer ones at lower prices in the wild." Syd's job also used to involve a lot of travelling; a new city usually meant more games. But as he notes: "The other thing that is important as a collector is to watch the trends. For example, I finished my Nintendo 64 collection when nobody else cared about it. Today, that is what everyone wants, so the prices have risen. Knowing the price curves of games can save you a lot in the long run."

You can check out Syd's Computer Museum at www.pcmuseum.ca he also has a YouTube channel, www.youtube.com/sydbolton, which has his *Cottage Cheese* episode. ★

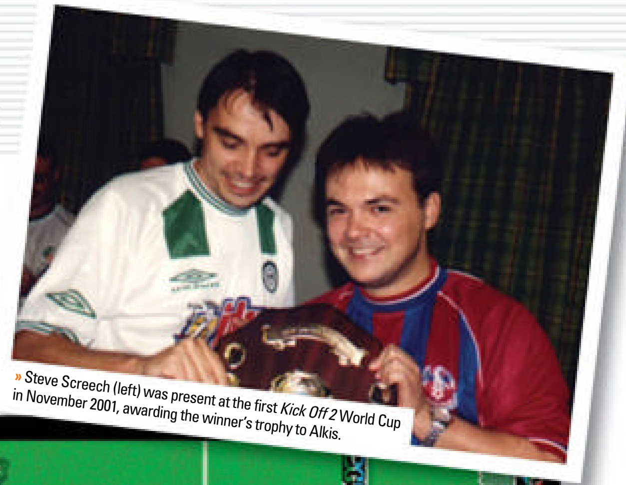
» Syd's dogs are rather fittingly called Coleco and Odyssey. They're also extremely cute.





Alkis Polyrakis

The two-time Kick Off 2 World Cup winner talks about the Kick Off Association



» Steve Screech (left) was present at the first *Kick Off 2* World Cup in November 2001, awarding the winner's trophy to Alkis.

Why was the association set up?
It started as a humble little forum in 2001, by four guys who lived in Angeren, Holland. All they wanted at first was to find more players in their area, but instead they started something that brought together people from all over Europe. That was mostly thanks to the presence of ANCO's Steve Screech, who agreed to develop a new game called *Kick Off* 2002 for the PC, with the participation and assistance of the association's members. Before long, Steve had the idea of hosting a tournament in Dartford, UK, and that is how it all began.

How much effort does it take to run each year?
During the first years, as more and more people joined us, the biggest challenge was to find some basic rules and regulations for tournaments that most people agreed with, as well as a viable rankings system. Nowadays, it's more about keeping players motivated. Unlike when we started, most of us who were teenagers in 1990 now have families, so travelling to play computer games tends to be a low priority.

How are your competitions run? Do they take place online or do you meet up together?
We only play online to practice. Official tournaments are strictly real life meetings, played on actual Amigas. We have held more than 550 tournaments, from Italy to Sweden to Greece and more than 400 players have attended. The most important event is our annual world cup.

Which version of *Kick Off* is most popular and why?
The general consensus is that it's *Kick Off 2*, which is what we use in tournaments. It perfected the original in every way. The versions that came after that experimented too much with the goalkeepers and that sort of diminished the fun.

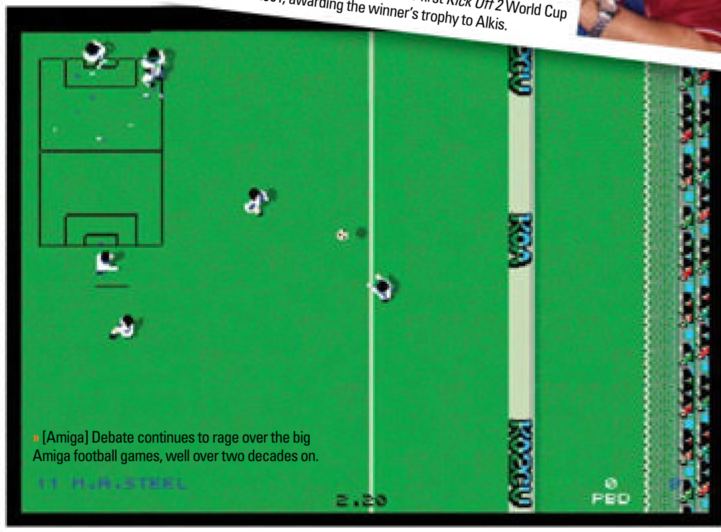
Do you keep the teams updated with the latest players?
No, but we have reverse engineered the *Kick Off 2* disk in order to add new pitch graphics as well as tons of new features.

Why set up a *Kick Off* association and not a *Sensible Soccer* one?
Because we are not retired yet, so we saw no need to choose a much easier game that simulates a golf ball.

We understand that you recently met up with the members of Sensible World Of Soccer United. How did that go down?
Oh, you know, it was high school all over again. We stole their lunch money, made them polish our joysticks, gave them wedgies… Nah, I'm kidding, of course. It was awesome of them to visit us during the 14th *Kick Off 2* World Cup in Copenhagen. We had a few laughs, they played some *Kick Off 2*, we played some *Sensible Soccer*… in all honesty, they are both amazing games and despite our personal preference we all agree that they are both much more fun to play than modern "football watching simulations." I, for one, have spent countless hours playing the career mode of SWOS. I hope I will manage to return the favor and join one of their gatherings in the future.

How can our readers become involved?
Easy, all you have to do is make an account in our forum at http://ko-gathering.com/forum/ and state that you like playing *Kick Off*. Chances are that there may be a tournament not far from you happening soon!

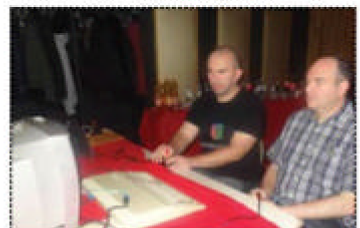
Why do you think *Kick Off* remains so popular with some gamers?
I believe that the main reason is the freedom that it offers to the player. The perfect ball simulation and flawless physics, as well as the absence of predefined joystick moves, results to a practically endless variety of plays and goals. Consequently, there are many different styles of play and we still see goals that we have never seen before, a quarter of a century after its release. Furthermore, *Kick Off 2* is a hard game that can never be mastered completely. No matter how good you are, there is always room for improvement, and if you forget that you're apt to get punished in a competition against the best players. It is impossible to get bored of something like that.



» [Amiga] Debate continues to rage over the big Amiga football games, well over two decades on.



» Skilled players Gianluca Troiano, Dagh Nielsen and Gianni Torchio show off their silverware.



» *Kick Off 2* programmer Dino Dini (right) has attended events hosted by the association.

"There are many different styles of play and we still see goals that we have never seen before"
Allkis on the enduring popularity of *Kick Off*



» The 2014 *Kick Off 2* World Cup in Copenhagen saw *Sensible World Of Soccer* fans acting as the away team.

BACK TO THE NINETIES



THE LATEST NEWS FROM JANUARY 1998

» [PlayStation] Immersive, atmospheric and (obviously) frightening, *Resident Evil 2* pressed all of the right buttons.

JANUARY 1998 – NUON is the new one, Marvel Vs Capcom again, Panzer Dragoon Saga hit for Sega, Skullmonkeys swing in and horror moves next door in The House Of The Dead. Richard Burton gets zombie blood lust…



There were rumblings that a new console project was under development although the few details that were available were sketchy at best. Nicknamed 'Project X', the development was underway with US semiconductor company VM Labs devising a new gaming platform for DVD players.

VM Labs staff were heavily populated by former Atari employees including Richard Miller, a former vice-president of Atari, John Mathieson, one of the developers at Flare Technology who created the Atari Jaguar console and the hairy coder extraordinaire, the yak man himself Jeff Minter, who had already created a couple of graphical demos for the new piece of kit.

With Minter on software duty and Miller and Mathieson devising the hardware, it was hard not to dismiss what they were planning despite very little detail being known. Eventually one word was gleaned from VM Labs sources as to what their system would be called. The answer was the NUON…

Arriving in arcades was *Marvel Vs. Capcom: Clash Of Superheroes*, the latest 2D fighting game in the ongoing series. As the title suggests, a plethora of Marvel's finest superheroes take on a diverse selection of Capcom's characters including Chun Li, Strider and Mega Man in a series of tag-team fights with the aim of progressing through your opponents until you meet the final boss, Onslaught, who is a combination of Professor X's and Magneto's consciousnesses poured into one super-lethal body.

This was the third game in the *Capcom Vs.* series in which the superheroes of Marvel are pitted against brawlers from Capcom's *Street Fighter* series. While these were both excellent offerings, the variety and the introduction of the Duo Team Attack, which allowed you to control both characters on your tag team simultaneously, raised the bar for the franchise with players rating it highly.

New out on the Sega Saturn was *Panzer Dragoon Saga* and unlike its predecessor it was more RPG that rail shooter. Thankfully the shooting elements had not been completely discarded. The opportunity to finally explore a world that could only be previously rushed through on dragon back was a very big deal for *Panzer* fans.

Despite arriving late in the Saturn's commercial life, *Panzer Dragoon Saga* was critically acclaimed by all. Being such a late comer and the Saturn struggling for sales, the US and European versions almost never got released, and when they did, it was in limited numbers. Therefore finding a minty fresh PAL copy will severely put a dent in your wallet.

If you like your scrolling platform games quirky, mostly constructed out of pixelated claymation styled graphics and featuring monkeys with skulls for heads, then The Neverhood/Electronic Arts latest game for the PlayStation would be the very game for you.

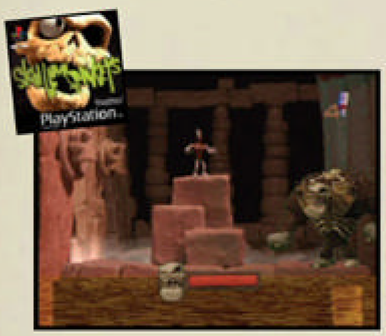
Skullmonkeys was a beautifully crafted piece of gaming despite the



» [Sega Saturn] *The House Of The Dead* is full of failed experiments and zombies. Time for a spring clean…



» [Sega Saturn] You can now get off your dragon, mooch about a bit and explore in *Panzer Dragoon Saga*.



» [PlayStation] Scrolling platformers can get tiresome quickly. Humour, bizarre characters and creative design stops that from happening in *Skullmonkeys*.

THIS MONTH IN…

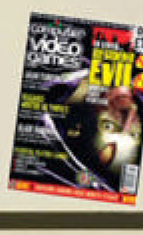
NEW ATARI USER

Formerly known as Page 6, *New Atari User* ran an interesting five page article on Atari's demise written by an ex-employee. Ultimately the feature ended up raising more questions than it answered. Where are the Atari archives? Where are the unpublished games and the originals of the ones that were? To name a couple.



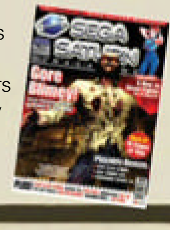
COMPUTER & VIDEOGAMES

C&VG had news that Nintendo was introducing a camera and printer system for its Game Boy handheld. Although still several months from release, the small thermal printer could produce stickers while the camera could scan your head into any compatible game.



OFFICIAL SEGA SATURN MAGAZINE

OSSM featured an interview with Sega about its new *The Lost World: Jurassic Park game*. Interesting points regarding the licensing deal with Universal was that no blood could be shown and no dinosaurs could be killed – slightly problematic for a dinosaur-shooter…





simplistic storyline. You are Klaymen and you must stop the evil Klogg from destroying your homeworld of The Neverhood… and that's about it. The game instructed players to collect clay balls throughout the game for bonuses and take out Klogg's skullmonkey minions as you progress.

Graphically excellent with some great use of FMV cutaways *Skullmonkeys* offered something different to the platform genre with its unusual style and superb music throughout. The music was written by Terry Scott Taylor and the title music is an upbeat tune with a hint of Tom Waits about it.

Skullmonkeys was refreshing although fans of the original game, *The Neverhood,* were a little alarmed to see their beloved point-and-click PC adventure become a console platformer.

Horror and zombies seemed to be all the rage with two new games featuring fast paced face blasting, blood splatteringly good graphics and plenty of itchy trigger finger action.

Although not quite ready for release, Sega were polishing up the last few pools of blood and caked on zombie flesh to bring us the imminent release of *The House Of The Dead*. The rail shooter contained multiple branching paths and the plot involved you saving your girlfriend from the house of a mad genetic scientist who has created all manner of ungodly creatures. All you had to do was progress through the house, kill the monsters, mess up the zombies, don't kill the humans and, ultimately, save the girl.

Gameplay was pretty much shoot as much as you can as quick as you can – forget being a sniper, its full bore scattergun blasting from the off. The atmospheric graphics and music were more than acceptable and *The House Of The Dead* thankfully retained a lot of the original coin-op feel.

PlayStation gamers had *Resident Evil 2* from Capcom to sink their teeth into. The survival horror game was more considered in its approach with puzzles and exploration at the heart of its gameplay although a dose of combat was never too far away – kind of like the zombies.

The premise for *Resident Evil 2* was also fairly straight forward. The city of Raccoon City was subject to a biological attack, thanks to Umbrella, a pharmaceutical corporation with a penchant for designed biochemical weapons and citizens were transformed into zombies as a result. You must escape Raccoon City whilst unfolding the mystery behind the event.

The graphics in *Resident Evil 2* were excellent utilising a combination of pre-rendered static digitized backgrounds which allowed for real-time generated characters and objects to be crisply constructed making for a much more realistic and atmospheric feel.

Reviewers generally liked it although criticism was pointed at some of the voice acting and the occasionally problematic controls. However gamers positively fell over themselves to get a copy and the PlayStation version became, at that time, the fastest selling videogame ever in the USA.

Needless to say many others consoles such as the Nintendo 64, Dreamcast and GameCube would all get their own versions of *Resident Evil 2* but with varying success. *

CHARTS

JANUARY 1998

NINTENDO 64



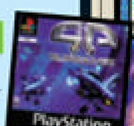
1 Lylat Wars (Nintendo)
2 Extreme-G (Acclaim)
3 Mario Kart 64 (Nintendo)
4 Super Mario 64 (Nintendo)
5 GoldenEye 007 (Nintendo)

PC



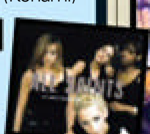
1 Championship Manager 2 '97-98 (Eidos)
2 Age Of Empires (Microsoft)
3 Jedi Knight (Virgin Games)
4 Command & Conquer: Aftermath (Virgin Games)
5 Riven: Myst 2 (Brøderbund)

PLAYSTATION



1 G-Police (Psygnosis)
2 Croc (Electronic Arts)
3 V-Rally (Ocean)
4 Ace Combat 2 (Namco)
5 Track & Field: Platinum (Konami)

MUSIC



1 Never Ever (All Saints)
2 Perfect Day (Various Artists)
3 Bamboogie (Bamboo)
4 All Around The World (Oasis)
5 High (Lighthouse Family)

JANUARY WORLD NEWS

2 January saw the death of British actor, comedian and writer Frank Muir at the age of 77. The prolific writer of radio and television comedy also featured on many radio panels show including *My Music* and *My Word*. Muir is probably best remembered for being one of the long running team captains on the quiz show *Call My Bluff*.

5 January saw Sonny Bono, musician, singer and, later in life, US congressman die at the age of 64. With his second wife they formed the singing couple Sonny & Cher who enjoyed huge popularity throughout the Sixties and Seventies. He tragically died from his injuries after hitting a tree while skiing in California.

6 January saw the launch from Cape Canaveral of the Lunar Prospector. It was a mission designed to map the surface composition of the moon. By the time the mission had ended on 31 July 1999, the Lunar Prospector had discovered frozen water on the moon's surface near its south pole.

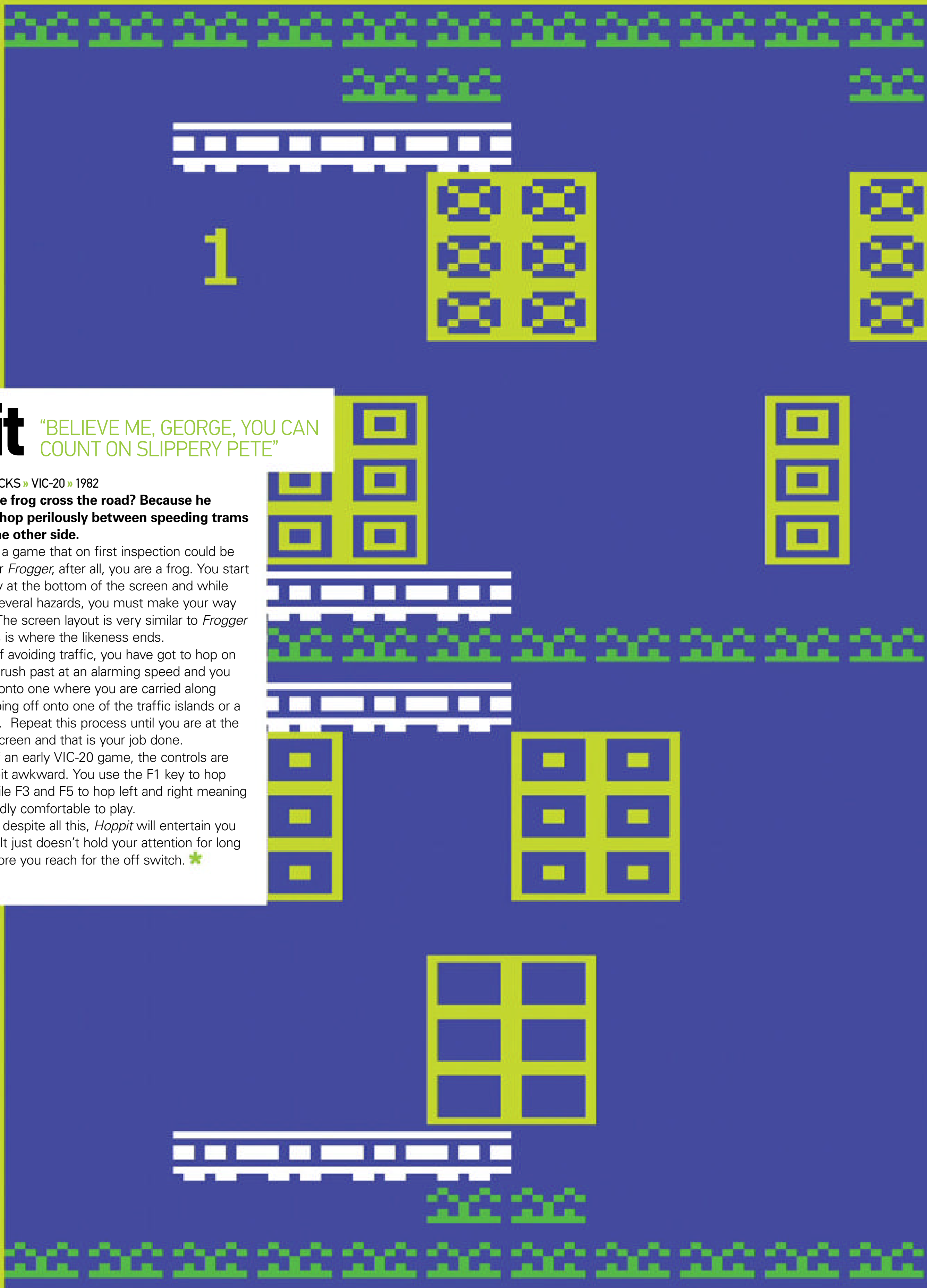
20 January saw the teen drama *Dawson's Creek* debut on US television. It was the usual mix of cool kids, teen angst sprinkled with lots of talk about shagging. As such, it garnered quite an audience and ended up running for five years.

21 January saw more unfortunate deathly misery with the passing of actor, Jack Lord, who was best known for portraying Detective Steve McGarrett in the Hawaiian based cop show *Hawaii Five-O* which ran for 12 years. He suffered with Alzheimer's disease for two years before dying from heart failure at the age of 77.



» [Arcade] Where would you find an unlikely fight between the Hulk and Zangief? *Marvel Vs Capcom: Clash Of Superheroes* that's where.

retroGAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL



Hoppit

"BELIEVE ME, GEORGE, YOU CAN COUNT ON SLIPPERY PETE"

#84

» D K MATTOCKS » VIC-20 » 1982

Why did the frog cross the road? Because he wanted to hop perilously between speeding trams to get to the other side.

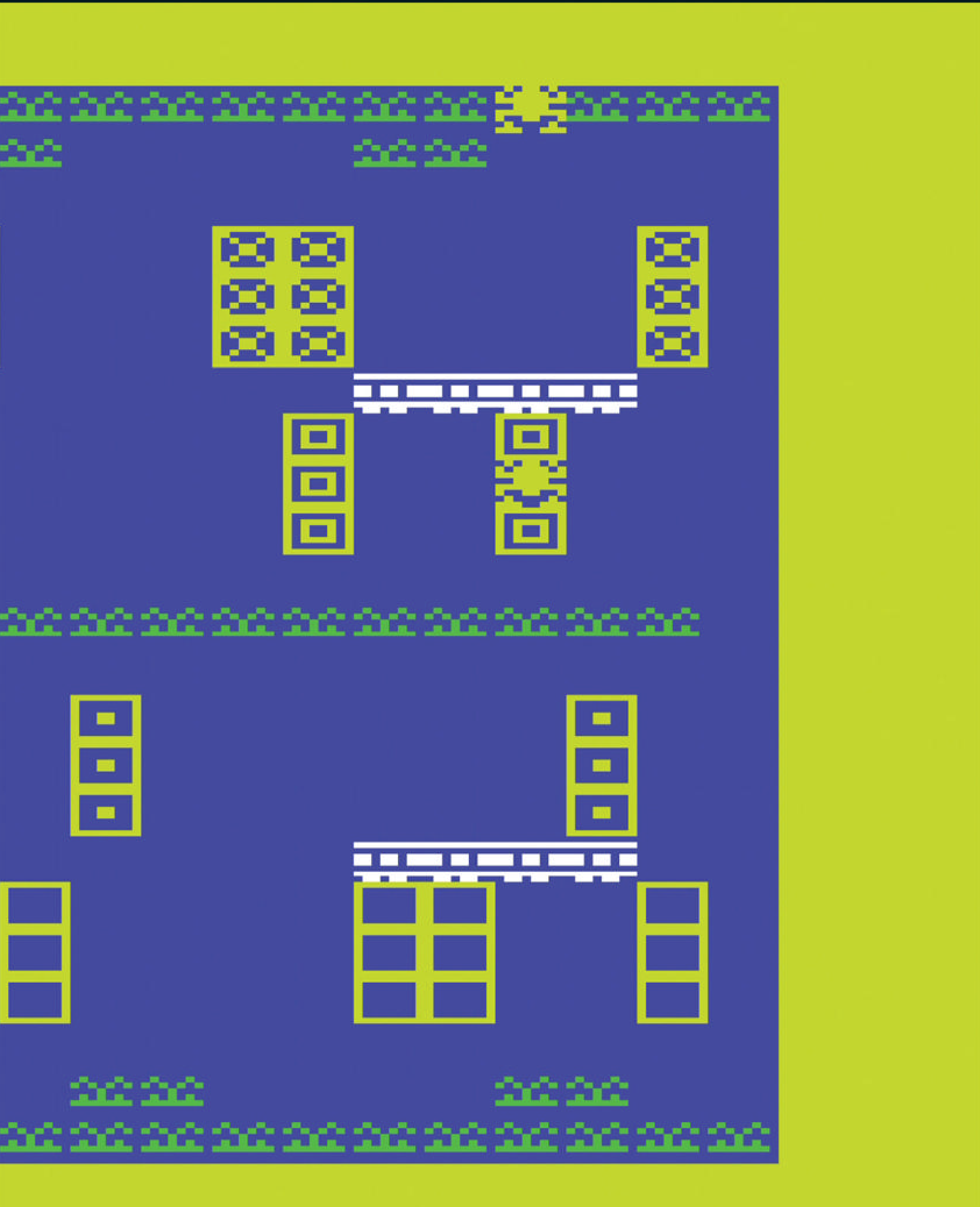
Hoppit is a game that on first inspection could be mistaken for *Frogger*, after all, you are a frog. You start your journey at the bottom of the screen and while traversing several hazards, you must make your way to the top. The screen layout is very similar to *Frogger* too, but this is where the likeness ends.

Instead of avoiding traffic, you have got to hop on to it. Trams rush past at an alarming speed and you must jump onto one where you are carried along before hopping off onto one of the traffic islands or a grass verge. Repeat this process until you are at the top of the screen and that is your job done.

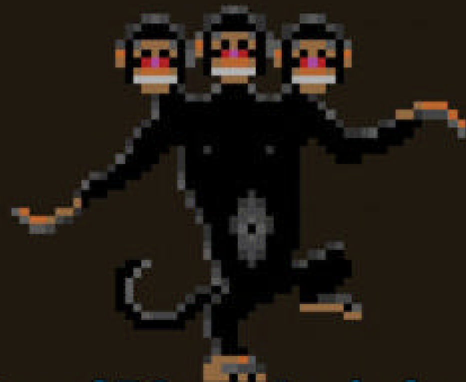
Typical of an early VIC-20 game, the controls are simple, albeit awkward. You use the F1 key to hop forward while F3 and F5 to hop left and right meaning that it is hardly comfortable to play.

However despite all this, *Hoppit* will entertain you for a while. It just doesn't hold your attention for long enough before you reach for the off switch. *

ANDY H



THE Bluffer's guide TO POINT-AND-CLICK ADVENTURES



Once a mainstay of PC gaming before the inevitable rise of the first-person shooter, the spirit of the point-and-click adventure lives on in games like L.A. Noire and The Walking Dead. Mike Bevan looks at how we got there…

FROM POINT TO CLICK

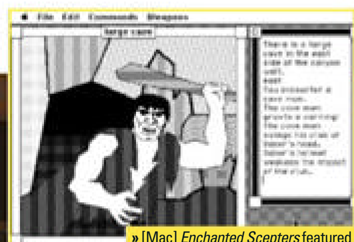




Whether the point-and-click adventure improved on the purer text input titles that came before is perhaps a matter of how creative your imagination was. While older titles like Infocom's *Zork* required you to envisage their worlds for yourself, the graphic adventure put it all there on your computer monitor. There's no denying that fleshing out an adventure game with detailed, full-colour graphics, and having a your own on-screen avatar wandering around interacting with their environment and other characters was a step towards greatly popularising the genre. Instead of struggling with vocabulary and trying to find the right description of objects to solve puzzles, they stripped back the parser-based interface into a more manageable collection of verb commands which could be selected using a pointer, for instance, you could use this system to use, open or combine items in your inventory. And this of meant no more typing.

To use a computer-related metaphor, it was like moving on from PC DOS to Windows. Titles such as *King's Quest V*, *The Secret Of Monkey Island* and *Beneath A Steel Sky* were simply a much more approachable experience for the average gamer. For companies like Sierra On-Line and LucasArts these games became big business in the early-to-mid Nineties, often being produced with lavish budgets for their time. And arguably, many of the best titles still offer more wit, imagination and character than a whole flotilla of soulless modern first-person shooters.

The appearance of some of the earliest point-and-click adventures can be attributed to the launch of the Apple Macintosh in January 1984. The first mass-market personal computer with a built-in mouse-driven graphical



» [Mac] *Enchanted Scepters* featured a primitive drop-down menu system for issuing commands.



Selected timeline

1984 — ENCHANTED SCEPTERS
■ This little-known adventure was the first to make use of the Apple Macintosh's point-and-click graphical interface.

1985 — DÉJÀ VU
■ A detective noir adventure originally released for the Mac which included a mouse-driven multi-window point-and-click interface.

1986 — LABYRINTH
■ The first adventure from Lucasfilm Games begins as a text-based game and morphs into a graphic adventure with a verb command system.

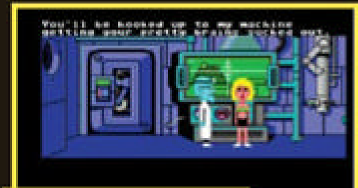
1987 — MANIAC MANSION
■ Originally released for the Commodore 64 and Apple II, *Maniac Mansion* featured a revolutionary point-and-click interface built around Ron Gilbert's *SCUMM* scripting language and game engine.

1988 — ZAK MCKRACKEN AND THE ALIEN MINDBENDERS
■ Utilising an improved version of the *SCUMM* engine, *Zak McKracken* allowed players to travel to a variety of locations around the globe before setting off on a mission to Mars.

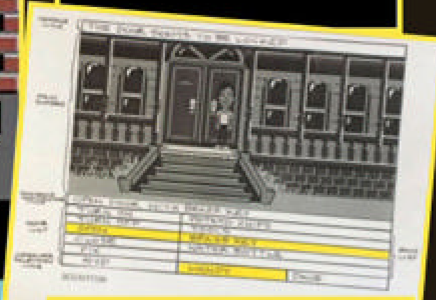
1989 — INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE
■ Released the same year as the movie, *Last Crusade* added action mini-games and a scoring system known as the IQ or 'Indy Quotient'



» [C64] *Labyrinth* was a collaboration between Lucasfilm Games' David Fox and Douglas Adams.



» [Amiga] The unfortunate Sandy Pantz gets in a pickle in *Maniac Mansion.*



» An original design document for *Maniac Mansion* showing the layout of the proposed point-and-click interface.

Know your Point-and-click Adventures

GRAPHIC ADVENTURE

■ An adventure game that displays visual representations of locations visited. In most point-and-click games the background scrolls with the player's on-screen character.

POINT-AND-CLICK INTERFACE

■ An icon-driven system for issuing in-game commands by clicking on verb options, exits or inventory items using a mouse, or more recently, touch-screen devices.

OBJECT HIGHLIGHTING

■ Many adventure games bring up text descriptions of objects or notable features when users hover their mouse pointer over them, making it easier to find items in each location.

NPC

■ A non-player character that the user can converse or interact with. In games like *Lure Of The Temptress* NPCs have their own AI and ability to roam around at will.

CUTSCENE

■ A non-interactive sequence that progresses the story. The term was coined by Ron Gilbert for *Maniac Mansion*, the first point-and-click adventure to use them.

DIALOGUE TREE

■ In most point-and-click adventures, users are able to choose from several alternative pre-written dialogue responses when in conversation with other characters.

UNWINNABLE SITUATION

■ Early point-and-click adventures, such as *Maniac Mansion* and *Kings Quest V*, allowed players to get into situations where they couldn't complete the game.

NO DYING PHILOSOPHY

■ From *Loom* and the first *Monkey Island* game onwards, LucasArts adopted a policy of eliminating player deaths and unwinnable situations from their games.

interface, the Mac leant itself to experimentation by developers. Released the same year, the first Mac point-and-click adventure title was *Enchanted Scepters* by Silicon Beach Software. Although at first glance it didn't look a lot different from previous graphic adventures, with static locations drawn in a window and a text descriptions alongside them, players selected commands via a drop-down menu. The following year's *Déjà Vu* by ICOM Simulations was even more innovative, offering a full point-and-click interface including an inventory with draggable objects, and a list of performable actions – examine, open, close, speak, operate, go, hit, and consume – that could be selected using the mouse.

Another innovative title was the debut adventure by Lucasfilm Games, the company that would later give us *Monkey Island* under the re-branded guise of LucasArts. Released in 1986 for the Commodore 64, *Labyrinth* was a curious hybrid of text and graphic adventure based on the Jim Henson movie of the same name. After an opening segment in which players typed their actions into a text parser, the game morphed into a graphic-driven storyline where you could choose your actions from an onscreen list of commands using the joystick.

"This was Douglas Adams' idea," says programmer David Fox, revealing the link between *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*'s author and the origins of the point-and-click adventure. "A team of us from Lucasfilm Games went to the UK to brainstorm with Douglas and lots of wacky ideas came out of the week long meetings we had. The idea was to pay homage to *The Wizard Of Oz* where it starts in "normal reality" in black and white, and when Dorothy finally lands in Oz, it's in full glorious Technicolor."

"The game equivalent to black and white is of course a text adventure," continues David. "We didn't open it up to full colour animation until you entered the Labyrinth through the movie screen at the neighbourhood movie theatre (which was playing the film, *Labyrinth*, of course). We thought the command system worked pretty well. Since we also let you select the items on the 'slot machine' user interface with cursor keys, as well as the first letters of the words, you could interact pretty rapidly."

> **"There was a great sense of power in being able to use SCUMM with characters"**
> Noah Falstein



Lucasfilm Games designer Ron Gilbert and graphic artist Gary Winnick took the next logical step in creating a fully menu-driven adventure with the following year's *Maniac Mansion*. "I played the *King's Quest* games as I was starting out thinking of *Maniac Mansion* and the thing that always bothered me was the parser," says Ron. "It was really a matter of not wanting to type or 'second-guess' the parser, it just made more sense to me to just point at an object and 'touch' it if you wanted to manipulate it. *Maniac Mansion* was really the game that started the whole point-and-click adventure thing, with the verb interface and everything."

Taking place in the creepy mansion owned by the Edison family, the game had a bizarre *Scooby Doo*-style plot where three teenage characters teamed up to rescue kidnapped a kidnapped cheerleader called Sandy Pantz. Players could 'warp' between



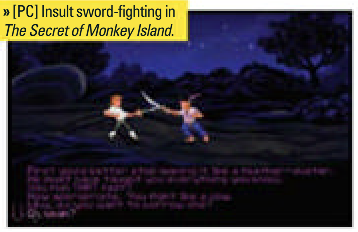
» [Amiga] A worrying news bulletin in *Zak McKracken And The Alien Mindbenders.*



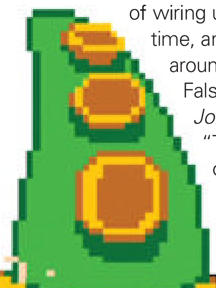
» [PC] The biplane escape scene from *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade.*

each of the three protagonists in the game, which proved an interesting mechanic for solving puzzles. "There's a couple of puzzles in *Maniac Mansion* that I really liked because somebody had to shut off the lights, and someone else had to flip over here, and somebody else had to do the generator," comments Ron.

As he began programming, Ron realised that "coding the whole game in 6502 was nuts" and began working on the game's other radical feature, the *SCUMM* scripting system. The beauty of *SCUMM* was that it encompassed both a script-driven game engine and easy to learn programming language, allowing LucasArts' designers to construct adventure games quickly without resorting to programming from scratch. It was also cross-portable allowing

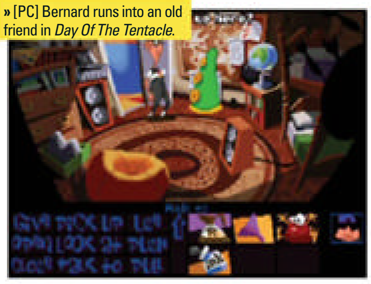


» [PC] Insult sword-fighting in *The Secret of Monkey Island.*



SCUMM games to be converted to other computer platforms painlessly. It would come to be the backbone of nearly all of the developer's forthcoming adventure catalogue.

"I do vividly remember the fun of wiring up a room for the first time, and sending the characters around," remembers Noah Falstein, co-designer of *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade.* "There was a great sense of power in being able to use *SCUMM* with pre-generated characters, and to be able to rough-out



» [PC] Bernard runs into an old friend in *Day Of The Tentacle.*

a scene or a dialog tree in less than an hour and see how it played out." *SCUMM* also allowed designers to easily flesh out each game's environment with points of interest to interact with, and even add scriptable cutscenes, a first for adventure games. "It's important in games to do a lot of the storytelling with the environment," adds Ron. "Players spend a lot of time looking at the screens, and it's great to use that to get small or funny details across, even if they are missed by a lot of players."

What makes a great Point and Click adventure?

The best features to craft a quest of extra epic proportions

STORY IS EVERYTHING

■ Some of the best point-and-click adventures can provide narratives that rival Hollywood blockbusters.

SENSE OF CHARACTER

■ LucasArts excelled in memorable characters. The *Secret Of Monkey Island* has enough for a dozen games.

EXOTIC LOCATIONS

■ You can see all these sights and more in a good point-and-click adventure. Their stories can take you across the globe and beyond.



MAKE 'EM LAUGH

■ Despite the brilliance of 'serious' adventures, it's the funny moments in games that are often most enjoyable.

WEIRD STUFF

■ We love puzzles that involve bizzare items like *The Secret Of Monkey Island*'s strange rubber chicken with a pulley in the middle.

LOGICAL PUZZLES

■ Nobody likes to get stuck in an adventure and most point-and-click puzzles hit that sweet spot in terms of difficulty.

Selected timeline

1990

LOOM

■ A music-inspired adventure from LucasArts, it introduced the more player-friendly concept of no failures or deaths.

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND

■ The most impressive and accessible of LucasArts' adventures to this point, the pirate-themed *Monkey Island* was a highly influential and memorable adventure.

KING'S QUEST V

■ The first adventure from Sierra On-Line, this was one of the first games of its type to be released on CD-ROM with voice acting provided by members of Sierra's staff.

1991

MONKEY ISLAND 2: LECHUCK'S REVENGE

■ This splendid sequel offered a much larger game world than the original and two levels of difficulty, one of which with extra puzzles.

LEISURE SUIT LARRY IN THE LAND OF THE LOUNGE LIZARDS

■ A remake of the risqué 1987 graphic adventure, replacing the outdated text parser with a point-and-click driven interface.

1992

INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS

■ An original Indy adventure scripted by screenwriter Hal Barwood, *Fate Of Atlantis* featured a globe-trotting storyline involving discovering the whereabouts of the fabled lost city.

LURE OF THE TEMPTRESS

■ The first adventure from British developer Revolution Software, *Lure of the Temptress* utilised the Virtual Theatre system which gave non-player characters the ability to wander around under their own AI.

DARK SEED

■ A psychological horror adventure with artwork by Alien-designer H. R. Giger, this was one of the first hi-res point-and-click games at the request of Giger himself.

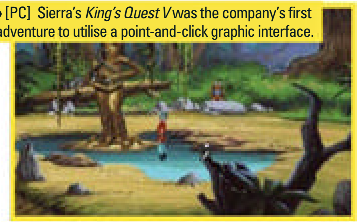


» [PC] The 1991 remake of the original *Leisure Suit Larry* in the *Land Of The Lounge Lizards.*

The second game to use the *SCUMM* system, David Fox's *Zak McKracken And The Alien Mindbenders*, broke away from the confines of a claustrophobic mansion, allowing players to jet around the world in the guise of a hapless newspaper journo countering a world stupidity epidemic. "I wanted to do a 'New Age' themed game," says David, "but I wanted to find a way to take all that and present it in a game that also was uplifting, fun and funny. I also wanted to make the game take place on a global… er, multi-global scale…" he adds, referring to Zak's later involvement in a bizarre co-ed mission to Mars. The game was the first to introduce a digital MIDI soundtrack to LucasArts adventures.

Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade also leant itself to global bullwhip-equipped shenanigans, and was a collaboration between several LucasArts designers. It added a number of action sub-games, in keeping with Indy's character in the originating movie. "Ron and David [Fox] were both better scripters than I, having honed their skills, so I focused more on elements of designing the action mini-games (boxing, biplane flying, etc)" says Noah. "Our approach with that game was to let the player spend most of his time in parts of the storyline not shown in the film, and we had the advantage of working with the original script. The boxing ring at Indy's college was actually based on some of the opening scenes that they cut, and the business with the radio operator on the Zeppelin was also in the movie. Indy actually refers to it in a line of dialog as he and his father board the biplane. "

Brian Moriarty's fantasy adventure *LOOM* was another early *SCUMM* title, featuring a unique musical interface where players could 'weave' spells or objects using four-note tunes. It was also the first LucasArts adventure to feature the 'no dying' philosophy taken up by the subsequent *Monkey Island* series and subsequent games. "I was particularly interested in making a game that would be easy for beginners to play and, most important, to complete," says Brian. "I wanted *LOOM* to be a game where it would be impossible to get stuck in dead ends or unfair puzzles, or put yourself in an un-winnable situation."



» [PC] Sierra's *King's Quest V* was the company's first adventure to utilise a point-and-click graphic interface.



» [PC] Revolution's rather impressive debut: *Lure Of The Temptress.*



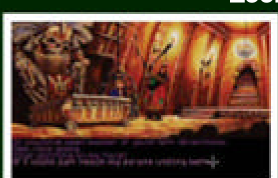
> "Monkey Island was the first game where I felt that I had once-and-for-all figured out what an adventure game should be"
>
> Ron Gilbert

But it was with *The Secret of Monkey Island*, released in 1990, that LucasArts' finally hit the gold standard for point-and-click adventure games. Inspired by Disney's *Pirates Of The Caribbean* theme-park ride, the game introduced the bumbling but lovable would-be pirate Guybrush Threepwood, and his arch nemesis, the zombie buccaneer LeChuck. Designed by Ron Gilbert, Dave Grossman and Tim Schafer, it was a game that could be thoroughly enjoyed by both seasoned adventurers and beginners. "*Monkey Island* was the first game where I felt I had once-and-for-all figured out what an adventure game should be," Ron admits. "It was just a much cleaner, tidier game." With the addition, we might add, of a rubber chicken with a pulley in the middle,

Aside from the great characterisation and writing, the beautifully depicted environments, and the inability to 'die' (bar a single

Five essential games

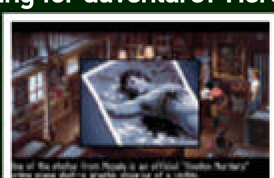
Looking for adventure? Here are a few of our favourite point-and-click titles to try



MONKEY ISLAND 2: LECHUCK'S REVENGE

■ 1991 ■ PC, AMIGA, MAC

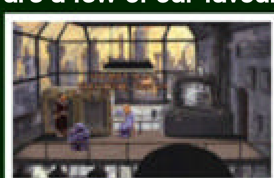
After kicking undead pirate butt in the first game, Guybrush returned in this final outing from Ron Gilbert. Roughly four times the size of the original, it featured four new islands to explore as our plucky hero searched for the legendary Big Whoop with the help of voodoo curses, carnival outfits and a curiously flexible monkey.



GABRIEL KNIGHT: SINS OF THE FATHERS

■ 1993 ■ PC, MAC

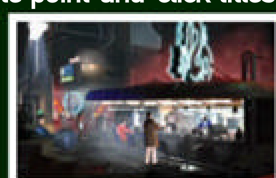
Set in New Orleans, Sierra's classic 'occult noire' adventure follows the exploits of the rare book store owner, Gabriel, as he investigates several grisly local murders that plunge him into a disturbing voodoo underworld. A remake from original writer Jane Jensen with improved graphics and new puzzles was released last year.



BENEATH A STEEL SKY

■ 1994 ■ PC, AMIGA, iOS

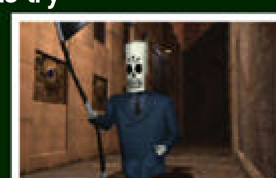
With some of the most striking graphics yet seen in an adventure game courtesy of *Watchmen* illustrator Dave Gibbons, Revolution's second release built on the 'Virtual Theatre' concept to create a believably stark futuristic world. A remastered edition, which was released for iOS devices in 2009, made the game available to modern audiences.



BLADE RUNNER

■ 1997 ■ PC

Westwood's take on the cult Ridley Scott movie allowed fans to revisit locations from the film while playing a completely seperate storyline with an entirely new character, the replicant-hunter, Ray McCoy. Similar Revolution's previous games it featured NPCs that wandered about with their own agenda, real-time gameplay and a staggering thirteen different endings.



GRIM FANDANGO

■ 1998 ■ Various

Inspired by Aztec Mythology and the crime novels of Raymond Chandler, Tim Schafer's *Grim Fandango* marked the first foray for LucasArts into 3D point-and-click adventures. Telling the story of Manny, a skeletal dogsbody employed by the Department Of Death, its humour, writing and characterisation is sublime, and the game is due for a re-release this year.

Simon Woodroffe

Simon was a key designer on the Simon the Sorcerer adventure games and The Feeble Files, and more recently became Creative Director at Rare



What were your earliest memories of playing point-and-click style adventures? Were any instrumental in inspiring you to create your own adventure games?
My earliest strong memories are the Sierra series (*King's Quest*, *Police Quest*, *Space Quest* and, when my parents weren't looking, *Leisure Suit Larry*). However, I was playing adventure games long before and appreciated the narrative focus and cerebral mechanics of them a long time before the interface to them changed to point-and-click! My father and his team had built several text based adventures and I'd been over to see the Adventure International office in Florida. Having said all that, it was *Monkey Island* that inspired me to want to make these types of games more than any other.

Do you think the point-and-click interface helped make adventure games more popular than the previous text parser games?
Without any doubt. It was far more accessible for people to have the potential choices narrowed down to a certain set of verbs and objects to play with, the reduced abstraction meant that the games were more relatable and you had the chance to see the wonderful art, animation and music to go along with the narrative. Nowadays I think designers can make the choice and still find an audience (I'd suggest *A Dark Room* as a great text adventure for those that haven't played it).

What's your favourite point-and-click adventure?
Le Chuck's Revenge. Of course!

What do you think about the return of the genre with projects like *Double Fine Adventure* and others on Kickstarter? Do you think people still have a fondness for that style of game?
The audience has always been there. People love stories! The 'style' of adventure games is arguably the purest vessel to tell them without all that mechanics nonsense getting in the way.

notable occasion) one thing particularly stands out. *Monkey Island* is genuinely really funny. Take for instance the simple solution to Guybrush escaping from a watery death tied to a rope with various sharp objects just out of reach. Or the concept of 'insult sword-fighting' where players have to come up with suitably witty responses to various adversaries' taunts, and then re-adapt them on meeting the infamous Sword Master.. "During the early stages *Monkey Island* we would watch old Errol Flynn-era pirate movies," comments Ron on this clever mechanic. "One thing that stood out was during the fights they always taunted each other with insults. I knew we needed to have sword fighting in the game – it was about pirates after all – but I didn't want to introduce any action gameplay and the old pirate movies provided us with the perfect solution…"

Though it had been successful with various instalments of the *Kings Quest* adventure series, along with franchises like the tongue-in-cheek *Leisure Suit Larry* games, LucasArts' competitor, Sierra, had been caught behind in the point-and-click development race. But in the same year that *Monkey Island* appeared the company finally released a title of its own. "The early *Leisure Suit Larry* and *King's Quest* adventures were graphic adventures but they still required typing," says former Sierra designer and creator of *Leisure Suit Larry*, Al Lowe. "*King's Quest V* was the first Sierra point-and-click game, and that changed everything. The point-and-click interface made the games much more accessible. My next game was *Leisure Suit Larry 5*, then Jim Walls did *Police Quest III* and Scott Murphy wrote *Space Quest IV*, all with the new interface. And I remember that all of our games were suddenly much easier, not because there were less puzzles but because people didn't have to worry about misspelling or guessing which words to use. We hadn't realised how so much of the puzzle-solving was purely down to the interface. And so of course, after that we put in more puzzles!"



» [PC] Westwood's *Legend Of Kyrandia* allowed players to drag onscreen items straight into their inventory.

The following year, Guybrush, along with love-interest Governor Marley, the mysterious Voodoo Lady, and the dread-pirate LeChuck returned alongside numerous brand new characters in *Monkey Island 2: Le Chuck's Revenge*. Much larger than the first game, it featured a more open structure with Guybrush being able to visit several islands, Scabb, Phatt,

Selected timeline

1993

DAY OF THE TENTACLE
■ *Maniac Mansion*'s sequel featured a time-travelling plot and full-screen animated graphics, inspired by Looney Tunes director Chuck Jones.

SIMON THE SORCEROR
■ A humorous fantasy adventure from British outfit Adventure Soft, *Simon* was another of the first adventures with full voice-acting.

SAM & MAX HIT THE ROAD
■ LucasArts animator Steve Purcell's canine and rabbit detective duo had previously cropped up in the *Monkey Island* series but now they got their own game.

GABRIEL KNIGHT: SINS OF THE FATHERS
■ Created by Sierra writer Jane Jensen, *Gabriel Knight* was possibly the finest of the company's adventures to this point, with its mature themes and dark storyline.

MYST
■ A first person adventure that dropped players on an island full of contraptions and puzzles, *Myst* used video and pre-rendered graphics in a way that amazed audiences.

1994

BENEATH A STEEL SKY
■ Taking place in a dystopian future Earth, Revolution's second adventure was notable for its striking hand-painted backdrops.

1995

FLIGHT OF THE AMAZON QUEEN
■ This tribute to *Monkey Island* and *Indiana Jones* was made on a small budget compared to LucasArts's games but compared favourably.

DISCWORLD
■ The first in a series of adventures based on Terry Pratchett's fantasy novels, the game was notable for being extremely challenging.

FULL THROTTLE
■ Tim Schafer's first project as lead designer, this biker adventure was the first from LucasArts to be released only on CD-ROM.

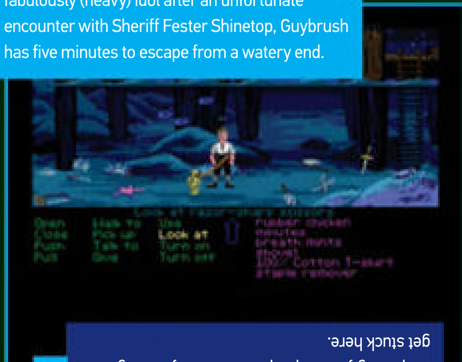
WARNING – Possible Spoilers!!

Point and Puzzled

Did you work out these head-scratchers?

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND

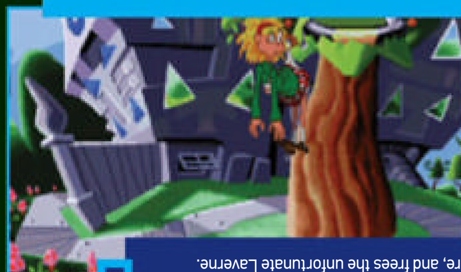
■ **The Puzzle:** Trapped underwater tied to a fabulously (heavy) idol after an unfortunate encounter with Sheriff Fester Shinetop, Guybrush has five minutes to escape from a watery end.



■ **The Solution:** The sharp pointy objects just out of reach are all red herrings. Guybrush simply has to pick up the idol and get out of the sea. Surprisingly some people did actually manage to get stuck here.

DAY OF THE TENTACLE

■ **The Puzzle:** Clumsy Laverne has got stuck in a tree in the future forcing Hoagie to rescue her from the past with the help of the Chron-o-John ™ and the first President Of The United States Of America.



■ **The Solution:** By painting the kumquat tree in cherry red you can convince Washington to cut it down, which means it no longer exists in the future, and frees the unfortunate Laverne.

SAM & MAX HIT THE ROAD

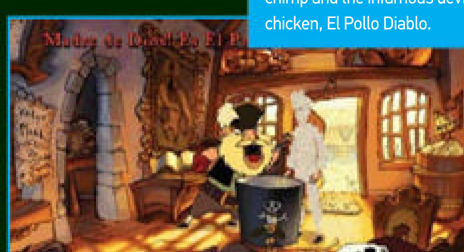
■ **The Puzzle:** Our intrepid freelancers must extricate their assignment orders from a mysterious courier prior to setting of on their adventures, but where and how do they find him?



■ **The Solution:** The courier turns out to be a kitten on the doorstep outside the pair's office. To get the papers you have to 'use' Max on him, who'll take care of the situation in his own special way…

THE CURSE OF MONKEY ISLAND

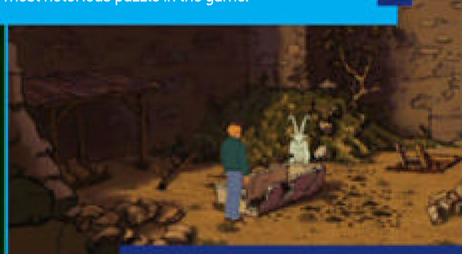
■ **The Puzzle:** Guybrush must get hold of a map to Blood Island to un-curse his beloved Elaine in a long-winded puzzle involving a chimp and the infamous devil chicken, El Pollo Diablo.



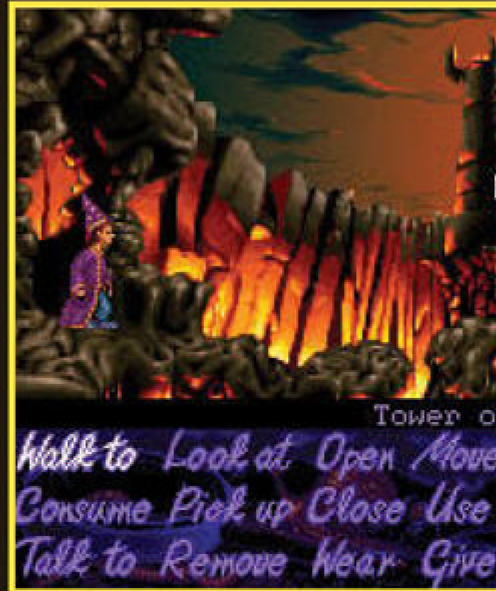
■ **The Solution:** By cutting the plank on the ship at Danjer Cove you'll end up getting tarred and feathered. Make a scary entrance at Blondebeard's restaurant then use the book on Captain LeChimp.

BROKEN SWORD: THE SHADOW OF THE TEMPLARS

■ **The Puzzle:** While attempting to reach Lochmarne Castle in Ireland, George Stobbart comes across a stubborn old goat that won't let him pass in the most notorious puzzle in the game.



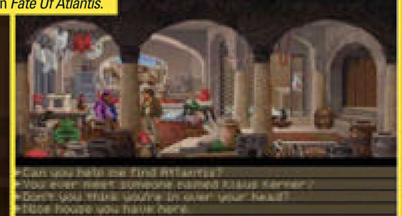
■ **The Solution:** Unlike the logic puzzles previously in the game, the solution is time sensitive. George must click on the nearby farm machinery at a critical point after the goat tries to butt him, causing him to get tangled up.

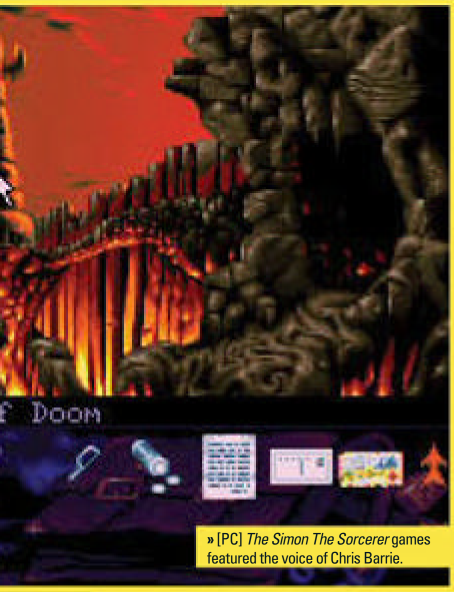


Booty and Dinky, in his quest for a mythical treasure called Big Whoop. It also marked the debut of the iMUSE interactive music system that provided a more atmospheric, context-sensitive soundtrack. Despite the excellence of the first game, *Monkey Island 2* bettered it in many departments, and is still one of the most highly regarded point-and-click adventures of all time.

Another studio that came late to the genre, fresh from developing the groundbreaking *Eye Of The Beholder* RPG series, was Westwood Studios. "We were certainly aware of *Kings Quest* and other graphic adventures but were probably much bigger fans of the LucasArts games like *Monkey Island* due to their humour," says Westwood co-founder Louis Castle. The company's first point-and-click adventure, The *Legend Of Kyrandia*, displayed an obvious affection for the fantasy setting of the *King's Quest* games, with long-suffering hero Brandon attempting to save his land from the curse of an evil jester named Malcolm." The game was developed with Sierra in mind as publisher, but was later released by Virgin Interactive. "I clearly remember feeling we had something special and evolutionary for the genre with Kyrandia which was certainly of interest to Sierra but we never sealed a deal before selling to Virgin," explains Louis. The series went on to include two further sequels, each starring a different protagonist, finishing with Malcolm himself in the final outing of

» [PC] Indy in Cairo in *Fate Of Atlantis*.





» [PC] *The Simon The Sorcerer* games featured the voice of Chris Barrie.

the series, *Malcolm's Revenge*.

British company Revolution Software entered adventure game market in 1992 with its debut, *Lure Of The Temptress*, also published by Virgin. What set the game apart from its competitors was the *Virtual Theatre* engine, which populated the various locations of the game with computer-controlled characters going about their daily business, shopping, chatting and wandering from place to place. "I felt we had to create not just a new gaming engine but something really different to what else was out there," says Revolution founder Charles Cecil. "So we spent £20,000 on producing the *Virtual Theatre* engine – a core piece of programming that would allow us to string commands together that would have an effect on in-game characters. Over the course of that year, we managed to crack it and so we were ready to produce our first game."

"These technology concepts [NPCs wandering around] were certainly unique. But Revolution was not sure how to develop them further in subsequent games. Nonetheless, the result was a quirky and entertaining adventure game that kicked off Revolution's fondness for characterisation and in-game humour. Historically in adventures, everything is driven by the player. But I didn't want to play those games any more. I wanted games that make you feel like you're part of a living world, rather than one that is static and reactionary. Most adventure people were just changing the story and knocking out the same game. That is very old school and I wanted to try to alter that."

> **"I clearly remember feeling that we had something special and evolutionary"**
> Louis Castle

Another British-based developer Adventure Soft released inspired fantasy point-and-click adventure, *Simon The Sorcerer*, in 1993. Parodying books like *The Lord Of The Rings* and *The Chronicles Of Narnia*, along with well-known fairytales, it starred a teenaged hero whisked into a magical world. *Simon The Sorcerer* was one of the first adventures to utilise full voice acting for its protagonist, courtesy of the *Red Dwarf* series' actor, Chris Barrie.

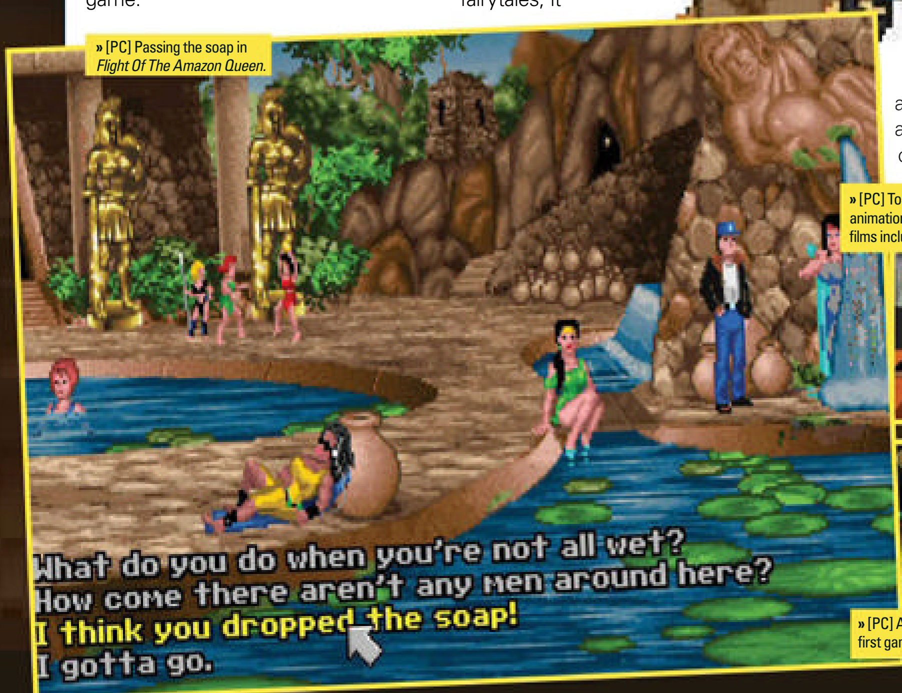


» [PC] Tim Schafer's *Full Throttle* was one of the only later LucasArts games that allowed player deaths.



"Simon was inspired by *Monkey Island* and the *Discworld* books," says writer and hero namesake Simon Woodroffe. "Chris Barrie was in my mind when writing scripts for *Simon*… I find it much easier to write if I imagine an actor I know well speaking the lines. I suppose it must have been quite a novelty for him to do a game. I think he cost £3000 pounds a day, which seemed reasonable to us." As well as the humour and rich visual design from the LucasArts adventures, *Simon* borrowed the established point-and click interface that the company had helped evolve. "There was a standard already set by LucasArts titles and it worked, so why change it?" says Simon. "Our focus was on telling our stories and making people laugh."

It seems that Guybrush's antics were an influence on a number of adventure game creators, including Australian



» [PC] Passing the soap in *Flight Of The Amazon Queen*.


» [PC] Torin's Passage featured hand-drawn animation by Jim Murphy, later animator on Pixar films including *Toy Story 2* and *Ratatouille*.


» [PC] Adventure Soft's *The Feeble Files* was one of the first games to feature hi-res pre-rendered 3D graphics.

Selected timeline

1996

THE DIG
■ Inspired by a short story by Steven Spielberg, *The Dig* was a grandiose CD-ROM release from LucasArts, this time with a strong sci-fi theme.

BROKEN SWORD: THE SHADOW OF THE TEMPLARS
■ The first game in Revolution's historically-inspired adventure series, *Broken Sword* introduced players to the series' hero George Stobbart.

1997

THE FEEBLE FILES
■ Adventure Soft produced this excellent sci-fi comedy adventure starring a green alien voiced by *Red Dwarf's* Robert Llewellyn.

THE CURSE OF MONKEY ISLAND
■ The first *Monkey Island* game to be developed without Ron Gilbert, *Curse* was LucasArts' final 2D adventure and featured more subtle comedy.

BLADE RUNNER
■ Westwood's cutting-edge adventure saw the appearance of a 3D rendered protagonist in a game world that progressed in real time.

THE LAST EXPRESS
■ From *Prince Of Persia's* Jordan Mechner, this was an ambitious adventure set on the Orient Express at the outbreak of World War I.

1998

GRIM FANDANGO
■ Often cited as one of the best of LucasArts adventures, this highly original game from Tim Schafer used 3D characters superimposed on static backdrops to great effect.

1999

THE LONGEST JOURNEY
■ Developed by Norwegian outfit Funcom, this was a spectacular and critically-acclaimed adventure with a lush fantasy setting, a memorable female lead character, and a complex and involving storyline.

2000

ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND
■ The final original *Monkey Island* adventure from LucasArts, featuring 3D graphics which proved controversial to the fans of the previous games.



» [PC] *The Broken Sword* series now spans five games, with the most recent released in 2013.

developer John Passfield, whose point-and-click outing *Flight Of The Amazon Queen* was directly inspired by LucasArts' pirate odyssey, with a little bit of *Indiana Jones* thrown in. "Seeing *Monkey Island* was a light bulb moment," says John. "I loved movies, comics and storytelling and I was very impressed with the mouse-driven interface. It's one of those things that when you first see it you think 'Of course! Why didn't I think of that?'"

At LucasArts, the popularity and critical acclaim lauded on the first two *Monkey Island* games meant that the company could invest in producing further *SCUMM* engine adventures with larger budgets, including the superb *Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis*, and the time-travelling *Maniac Mansion* sequel *Day Of The Tentacle*. Meanwhile, there were plenty of options from other developers for stepping into unusual point-and-click roles, including a nautical Poirot-style detective in Delphine's *Cruise For A Corpse*, a Soviet intelligence officer in Cryo's *KGB*, a 1930's adventurer in Dynamix's *Heart Of China*, or even a Wild West chemist in Al Lowe and Sierra's *Freddy Pharkas: Frontier Pharmacist*. Revolution Software released the stunning *Beneath A Steel Sky*, a futuristic cyberpunk adventure



> **"I loved the graphic adventures we produced that I didn't work on, like Loom and Monkey Island"**
> David Fox

with background graphics by Dave Gibbon's, co-creator of the Watchmen comic-book series. Adventure Soft published a *Simon* sequel, *Simon The Sorceror II: The Lion, The Wizard And The Wardrobe,* and Sierra writer Jane Jenson created the excellent debut in her *Gabriel Knight* series, a surprisingly mature and dark excursion into the underworld of New Orleans. With the range and breadth of product available by the mid Nineties, the point-and-click adventure really had come of age.

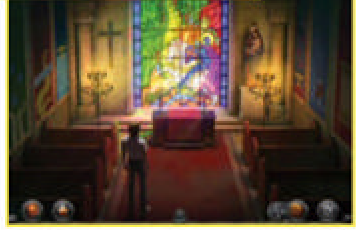
Developers began pushing the graphic capabilities of newer PCs and consoles like the PlayStation with full-screen animated cutscenes and CD-ROM based video segments, notably in LucasArts releases like *Sam & Max Hit the Road*, *The Dig*, and *Full Throttle*. Other games like Revolution's *Broken Sword: The w Of The Templars*, Sierra's Torin's Passage and Jordan Mechner's *The Last Express* took a similarly cinematic approach, with techniques like rotoscoping, producing games that gave the impression of interactive cartoons.

With the arrival of PC 3D graphics cards and the rising popularity of games like *Doom* and *Quake* there was a desire to move away from the traditional 2D cell-animation derived look of the adventure releases up to that point. Cyan's *Myst* demonstrated how pre-rendered 3D graphics, delivered from CD-ROM, could be used to create an enticing and immersive interactive world. Another ambitious title, Westwood's *Blade Runner* was the first adventure of its kind to include 3D polygon character models, and was also notable for featuring a game world that progressed in real time.

"For *Blade Runner* we needed to adapt the context sensitive mouse to a true 3D space," says Louis Castle. "We used a complex database to mostly eliminate the typical text selections. We could infer from your progress what you were likely to be interested in and ask those questions with a single click. You could also turn on the text trees to specifically ask questions for a more traditional feel. The true 3D was manageable because we always knew where the camera was in a scene and how it would travel to the next."

Adventure Soft delivered *The Feeble Files*, a sci-fi outing with a similar sense of humour to its Simon games, but "We were feeling a bit of writer's block with *Simon*," says Simon Woodroffe. "It felt like a good time to have a break and many people on the team pitched characters and ideas for alternative stories. An alien world allowed the whole team to try out new things and the character of Feeble was about the opposite of Simon as you can get. I was also a big fan of *Doctor Who*, *Red Dwarf*, *Star Trek* and *Blake's Seven*."

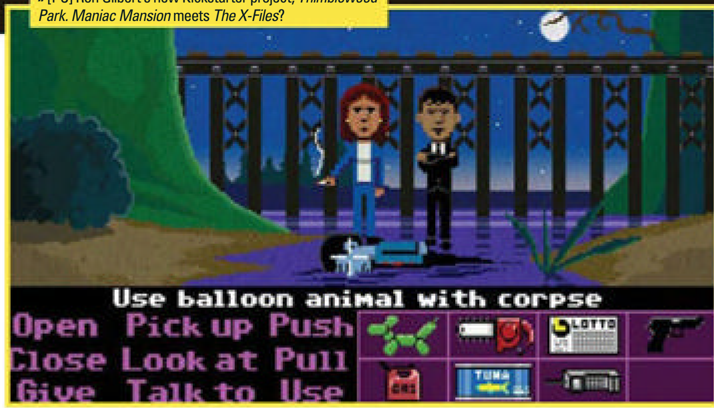
» [PC] The recent 20th Anniversary remake of *Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Fathers*.



» [PC] Recent games like *The Raven: Legacy Of A Master Thief* prove the genre is still popular.



LucasArts' Grim Fandango, a 3D evolution of the older *SCUMM* games designed by Tim Schafer, was influenced by Origin's action-adventure *Bioforge*. Like *Blade Runner* it featured 3D characters superimposed over pre-rendered backgrounds. Its game engine, *GrimE*, was also employed for the company's final original adventure release, *Escape From Monkey Island*, published in 2000. But the passing of the Nineties seemed to mark the apparent demise in commercial viability of big-budget point-and-click adventure games, despite the critical acclaim heaped on late-era titles like *Grim Fandango* and Empire Interactive's visually gorgeous *The Longest Journey*.



» [PC] Ron Gilbert's new Kickstarter project, *Thimbleweed Park. Maniac Mansion* meets *The X-Files*?

However it seems that in the decade since then, the adventure game has made something of a comeback. Re-mastered versions of the first two *Monkey Island* titles, along with the likes of *Beneath A Steel Sky*, *Gabriel Knight*, *The Last Express*, *Grim Fandango* and Revolution's *Broken Sword* games have allowed a new audience to experience classic point-and-click adventuring on modern PCs and devices like Apple's iPhone. Episodic releases like Telltale Games' rebooted *Sam & Max* and *Tales From* Monkey *Island* have proved popular, and its *The Walking Dead* series has been critically acclaimed for its moral choices which can radically alter the unfolding storyline. Even one of the biggest games of recent years, Rockstar's *L.A. Noire*, is essentially a big-budget point-and-click adventure. And successful Kickstarter projects such as Tim Schafer's *Double Fine Adventure* and Ron Gilbert and Gary Winnick's upcoming *Thimbleweed Park*, a new multi-character adventure in the style of *Maniac Mansion*, have shown that the market is still hungry for new point-and-click adventure games. "From the beginning, we knew we wanted to make something that was a satire of *Twin Peaks*, *X-Files* and *True Detective*," says Ron about his recently funded new venture.

"I loved the graphic adventures that we produced that I didn't work on, like *Loom* and *Monkey Island*," admits David Fox, one of those responsible for refining the genre in the early days at Lucasfilm Games. "I don't think I was aware at the time that I was helping to define a new type of graphic adventure game. I think our goal was creating puzzles that made people laugh with joy when they solved them. We wanted people to have that 'a-ha!' moment when they figured it all out… Maybe our legacy was the storytelling we had in our games, along with attention to detail. I'm hoping our legacy was just great fun." ✱



» [PC] *The Longest Journey* received rave reviews on its release in 1999.



» [iOS] *The Secret of Monkey Island: Special Edition* featured remastered HD characters and backgrounds.

Selected timeline

2002 SHERLOCK HOLMES: THE MYSTERY OF THE MUMMY
■ An enjoyable yarn by Frogwares which has received nine sequels.

2003 THE BLACK MIRROR
■ An interesting horror game that's set in an extremely creepy mansion. Although it drew praise for its aesthetics, its voice acting and puzzles weren't as good. It's been followed by two sequels.

THE ADVENTURES OF FATMAN
■ Michael Doak's game received plenty of acclaim due to its use of the *Adventure Game Studio*.

2005 BONE: OUT FROM BONEVILLE
■ TellTale's first adventure easily channelled the point-and-click games of old, while introducing TellTale's now well-used episodic structure.

2006 SAM AND MAX SAVE THE WORLD
■ Steve Purcell's classic characters returned and it felt that they'd never been away. Two sequels followed.

2011 L.A. NOIRE
■ Underneath the impressive face technology and high budget is a fairly average adventure, albeit a great homage to classic film noir.

2012 THE WALKING DEAD
■ Of the many TellTale adventures that have been released this is easily the best. It's a captivating piece of work that forces you to make tough decisions and witness harsh brutality.

2013 BROKEN SWORD 5: THE SERPENT'S CURSE
■ The fifth *Broken Sword* game was a Kickstarter-funded project that was released in two parts. It adds little new to the genre, but it's nice to see George and Nico again.

2015 GRIM FANDANGO SPECIAL EDITION
■ The classic LucasArts adventure is being remastered by Tim Schafer's Double Fine. *Day Of The Tentacle* will follow.



CLASSIC MOMENTS

Trantor: The Last Stormtrooper

» **PLATFORM:** AMSTRAD CPC464 » **DEVELOPER:** PROBE » **RELEASED:** 1988

It's not easy to survive the first few floors of *Trantor: The Last Stormtrooper.* Enemies attack relentlessly, swooping in high and low from both sides. As if that wasn't enough, you're working under a time limit and your flamethrower has limited ammunition. In short, you're constantly fighting for your life out there. However, the one thing you can count on is that the enemies don't seem to change in form or character between floors – and better yet, you've not encountered any new threats.

Unfortunately for you, everything changes on the fourth floor. An organic-looking backdrop usually spells trouble, and soon enough you're attacked by a small froglike enemy. "It could be worse," you think to yourself as you soldier on – but your reactions fail you as an enormous enemy the size of Trantor himself appears on the screen, instantly changing the tone with its threatening presence. Its resemblance to *Alien*'s titular terror soon proves to be apt, as it ends your game in just a single hit. Time to dust yourself off and try again… *

BIO

While Probe Software is generally remembered for its handling of licensed software, the developer had a great thing going with original software in the late Eighties. The run-and-gun adventure *Trantor: The Last Stormtrooper* was a particular highlight, with Trantor forced to hunt for terminals across multiple floors of chaos in order to put together passwords and make his escape. Nick Bruty provided graphics for the initial Spectrum and Amstrad versions, with David Quinn coding the former and David Perry the latter. The game was later converted to Commodore 64, Atari ST, MSX and DOS.



MORE TRANTOR: THE LAST STORMTROOPER MOMENTS

Eye Candy



To be honest, we chose the Amstrad version because it just looks so nice. The system's trademark bold, colourful sprites are on show here, and the animation is uniformly fantastic. Enemies shatter into a shower of pixels in a most satisfying manner, too. Games like *Trantor* just go to show that when the Amstrad is treated properly, games look phenomenal.

Absolute Power



Getting a shield power-up means just one thing: it's time to sprint. As Trantor sparkles, he can run through enemies with impunity, destroying them as he goes – even the big alien creature will fall. Additionally the moving barriers will no longer damage you, meaning that you can fully enjoy your brief but welcome respite from the game's relentless onslaught.

Access Denied

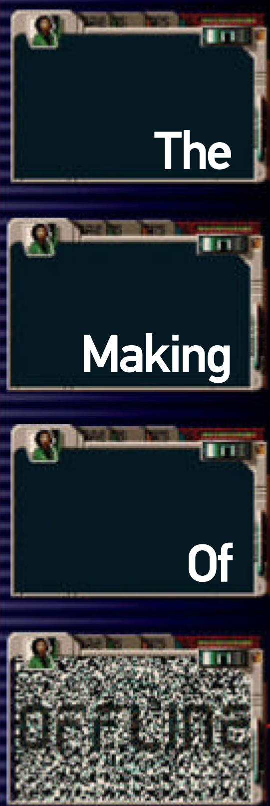


Upon reaching the fifth floor down, a little exploration will lead you to the gigantic terminal which you need to enter your password into. It's a mighty impressive sight, but unfortunately getting the password into the system isn't the end of your daring escape. You're only about half-way through – time to dash to the transporter!

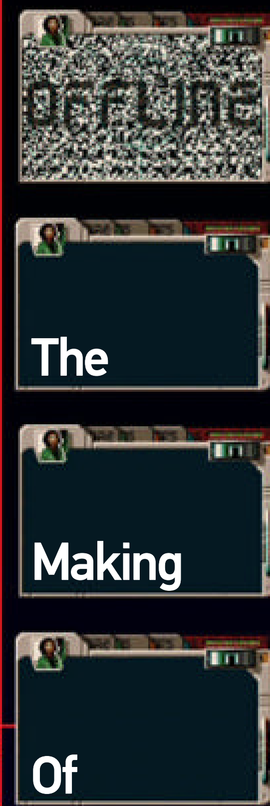
Performance Probe



Trantor's survival ratings come with some pretty funny assessments at the low end, but our favourite is the one at 9% – "Is that you, Fergus?" The use of that specific name doesn't make much sense, until you realise it refers to Fergus McGovern. The Probe boss was a frequent target of amusing in-game jabs, such as *Mortal Kombat II*'s infamous Fergality.



The Making Of HIRED GUNS



Unveiling a journey through fantasy and science fiction, James Churchill speaks to Steve Hammond and David Osborne about the underrated gem in DMA Design's crown



IN THE KNOW

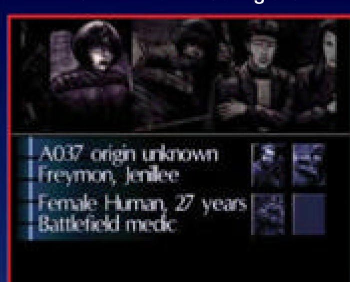
» **PUBLISHER:** PSYGNOSIS
» **DEVELOPER:** DMA DESIGN
» **RELEASED:** 1993
» **PLATFORM:** AMIGA, PC
» **GENRE:** RPG

"HIRED GUNS 101"

■ *Hired Guns* is a first-person sci-fi dungeon crawler with a four way split screen. Whether navigating through cavernous levels, shooting bio-engineered creatures or puzzle solving, it's possible for one player to control four characters simultaneously.

As a first-person dungeon crawler with FPS elements, a science fiction setting and four-way split screen gameplay, *Hired Guns* is unique. And for Amiga owners in 1993, unprecedented. Whilst dungeon crawlers like *Dungeon Master* and *Eye Of The Beholder* previously enthralled gamers, they didn't boast a grimy cyberpunk visual style, tense four-way co-operative play or the vast array of characters and weapons seen in *Hired Guns*. Instead of competitive play emerging in first-person shooters of the time such as *Doom*, *Hired Guns* focused on co-operation, capturing the experience of fighting as a team of mercenaries with your mates by your side. "It was a four-way split right from the beginning," recalls Steve Hammond, the writer for the game. "All of the team members had to be placed in the right spots to solve puzzles. It was something you simply couldn't do with a single character."

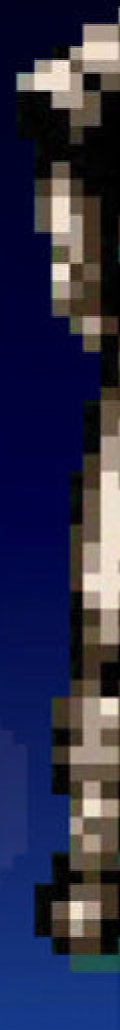
But not everything was set in stone. *Hired Guns* was originally envisioned with a Western fantasy setting in mind, being programmed and created by lead designer Scott Johnston using the assembly code for the Motorola 68000 microprocessor. Steve recalls the prototype (known as *3DGame*) vividly. "To represent avatars in the prototype, photos were taken of the DMA Design staff pulling silly faces which were altered to become giant disembodied heads floating around



» [Amiga] Characters have different abilities and load outs, making team building a cerebral task in itself.

the maps. They were the giant floating heads of DOOM!"

It was after this phase that Steve was brought into development as a writer. "I wasn't even a writer at DMA to begin with. I was some kind of graphics guy, porting visuals from the Amiga to the C64 for *Ballistix* and *Shadow Of The Beast*," says Steve. But his creative efforts outside of work landed him the role. "Scott wandered over to my cave one day – 'caves' were what some of us made with the cubicle partitions – and was impressed by a screamsheet for the roleplaying game *Cyberpunk 2020* that I had written, typeset and pinned to my wall. He asked me if I wanted to write the *Hired Guns* story. I immediately said yes, without any idea of what would be involved." Steve ended up writing biographies for the characters, a short story which acted as the game's narrative prequel, in-game dialogue triggered by player actions and the backstory for the game's solar system, with



details on every planet. "I'm a complete astronomy nut," he adds.

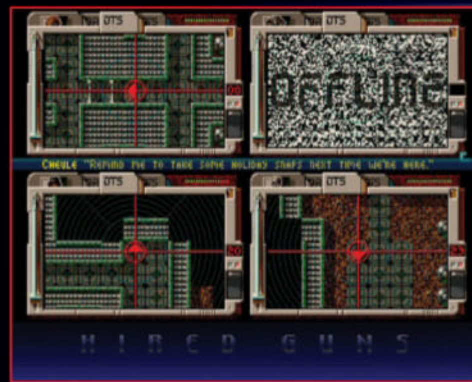
It was soon after Steve's involvement that *Hired Guns* saw the shift of the setting from fantasy to science fiction, although the reason for this decision remains debateable. "I have to be fair and explain that Scott remembers this differently from me. As far as I could see, all games of the RPG genre were fantasy, with science fiction being underrepresented to the point of invisibility, so I persuaded (as I saw it) Scott to turn it into a science fiction game. Scott says he turned it into a science fiction game because of *Aliens* and all the cool weaponry, particularly the gun turrets. Perhaps it was just one of those things which was meant to be."

This new direction lead to *Hired Guns*' gritty visual style. "One of the reasons it looks good is its unified palette, it wasn't bright and garish like so many games were," says visual designer David Osborne (a.k.a. Oz). "All the in game assets were done by hand first. For art we used Deluxe Paint 4. But the cut scene images were photo composites done on a Mac, not too common a practice for the day." However, the visual designs for the monsters had already been implemented before the change of setting. The team at DMA then decided to work around the problem instead.

"Things were so lean in production you would change what you had more often than throw it on the editing floor," David says. This approach proved an interesting challenge for Steve. "Changing [the narrative] became about providing a science fiction workaround for what were clearly fantasy monsters. Once I'd had the idea of making them engineered bioweapons the plot started to suggest itself."



» [Amiga] Using a mouse over joypad is the optimal control method.



» [Amiga] The mapping system helps create a deep and cohesive world.

However, the narrative was the one element cut short for the end product, leaving out the original campaign scenario: one where the characters were lured to test bio-engineered weapons under the pretence of a hostage rescue mission. Steve says: "There were some issues with the Amiga being able to fit all the needed assets in. What we ended up with was a simplified mission to collect four nukes and blow it all up. A consequence of this was that the Image Verification Camera was left out. This would have been part of the plot to obtain evidence of illegal genetic experimentation. It was a camera whose images could be ▶



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

BLOOD MONEY
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1989

LEMMINGS (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1991

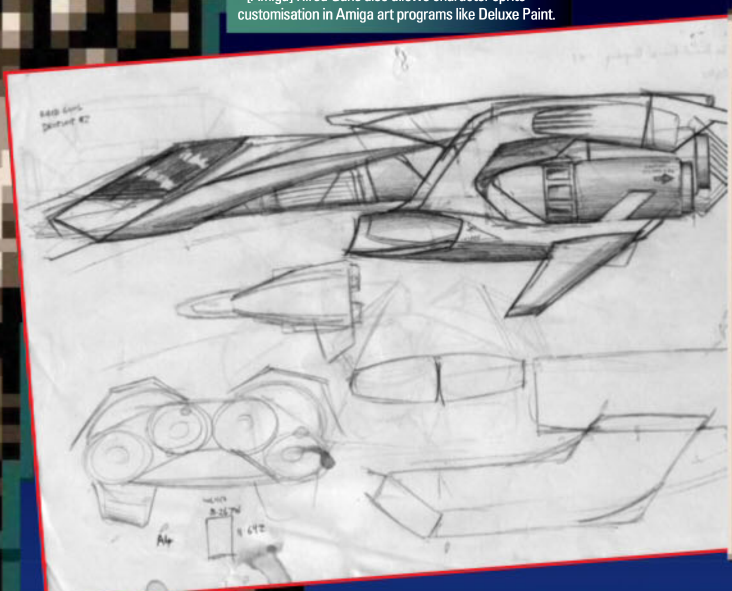
WALKER
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1993



» [Amiga] *Hired Guns* also allows character sprite customisation in Amiga art programs like Deluxe Paint.



> "I wasn't even a writer at DMA to begin with. I was some kind of graphics guy porting visuals"
>
> Steve Hammond recalls his early days at DMA

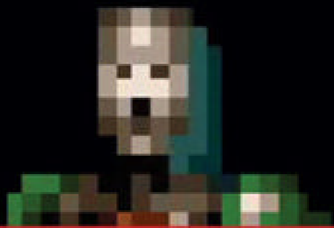


MASTER OF THE UNIVERSE

A rare look at the design documents of Hired Guns

As creator of the timeline, story and solar system for *Hired Guns*, Steve Hammond is in possession of a lot of material used during the development of the game which has never seen the light of day. As a writer, graphician and all round good guy, Steve has given us access to his collection of never before seen material including a map design, a sketch of the mercenaries' drop ship and his developmental work for the manual, all typeset on the Amiga. In fact Steve still has his Amiga development kit and boldly claims his devotion to the platform "The Amiga was the best home computer ever made!"





TEN DEFINING HIRED GUNS MOMENTS



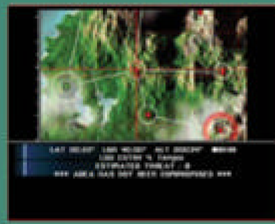
THE INTRODUCTION SEQUENCE

1 The opening of the game creates a wonderful feeling of suspense with a brilliant electronic score by Brain Johnston. It's so good it would make Kraftwerk turn grün with envy.



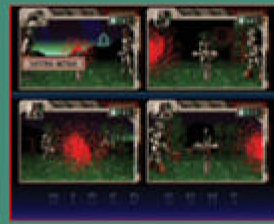
THE ABANDONED DEPOT

2 The first mission of the campaign is beautifully tense as the music stops, leaving only the sound of a dark ambience. It's time to creep into the the depot and confront the unknown.



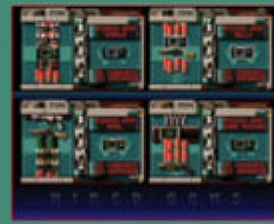
NAVIGATING GRAVEYARD

3 The overworld map allows the player to select their own route through the campaign on this moon. The experience is accompanied by the sounds of thunder and howling winds.



DEPLOYING THE AUTO SENTRY KIT

4 This is one of the most fun weapons to employ. The kit acts as a turret, blasting anything in its path. This can lead to the breakdown of friendships during co-op play.



USING PSIONIC AMPLIFIERS

5 The psi-amps allow you to use abilities, offering solutions to fighting and puzzles. Abilities such as electrocution and breathing underwater are a few at your disposal.

▶ proven to be unfaked. I'm rather pleased that twenty years after I wrote the idea, cameras like this actually exist."

Even with the creative exclusions, Steve and the team used a wealth of influences during development. "We had to go to the library as there was no such thing as the Internet," recalls David, who named H.R. Geiger as an artistic inspiration. Steve delved into a range of written works. "At the time I started jotting down initial notes, I was reading Iain M. Banks' *Consider Phlebas*, which centred on a group of mercenaries. One additional influence was the politically aware *2000AD* spin off *Crisis*, in particular a Pat Mills strip called *Third World War*. The character of Eve made an impression on me and it was with her in mind that I created Cheule Siygess, who was certainly the protagonist as far as the overall story was concerned." Steve is also quick to mention the extent of Scott Johnston's reading. "Scott did research on the weapons, naming them too. I remember seeing a small libraries worth of books on his desk describing all kinds of firearms!"

Although research and development proved enjoyable, the run up to release was a trying experience. One stumbling block was the character illustrations, which the player models would be based on. "I described all of the characters to our illustrator who then proceeded to ignore everything I'd said, and then made a set of twelve character drawings which didn't resemble the descriptions. Deadlines on the manual meant we'd no choice but to use those and so I assigned each to the character which vaguely fitted," Steve says. "This had one important consequence: I'd described Cheule, as having a resemblance to Grace Jones. What I ended up with was a blonde with a new-wave hairdo. So it kills me, absolutely kills me, that we could have had a black female protagonist in a computer game… in 1993! I am sure that would have been a world first."



» [Amiga] The levels for *Hired Guns* possess huge variation, requiring the player to traverse a number of unique areas.

> "I think at the time they only wanted to promote Lemmings sequels."
> Steve recalls that *Hired Guns* was a tough sell



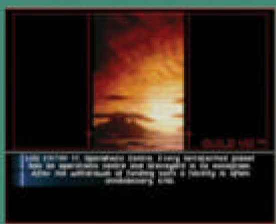
» The concept for the character of Cheule (left) and the final design (right). The resemblance is uncanny, right?



» [Amiga] Items can be damaged by factors such as water, turning them into "unidentifiable remains".

Another annoyance was the game's publisher, Psygnosis. "I'm pretty sure they didn't really care for [*Hired Guns*] that much. A perfect example of this was the manuals and storybook which came with the game. Scott wrote a whole pile of notes for the instructions. He was appalled to see that they'd just cut and pasted his notes wholesale, without any attempt at editing. And we never got to see any proofs. The first we saw of it was our complimentary copy. Scott wasn't as pissed off as I was though; my story and background had the punctuation missing. What made this particularly galling was Psygnosis urgently shouting about a deadline for the text a few weeks hence, then when I sent it to them they sat on the whole thing for eleven months. Just speculation, but I think at the time they only wanted to promote *Lemmings* sequels."

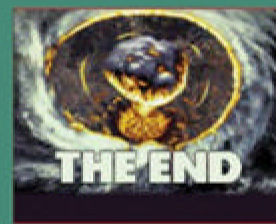
Although *Hired Guns* received critical acclaim upon release, it failed to do as well as was hoped. The reason? "Timing," explains Steve. "*Hired Guns* was released in











GATHERING THE FUSION RINGS

6 Four fusion rings are needed to complete the campaign. The levels that house them are some of the most tense in the game, laying on disturbing noises that only ramps up the tension.

FOUR PLAYER CO-OP

7 Gathering four of your friends or whoever is around at the time for *Hired Guns* creates one of the best multi-player experiences in gaming. You experience the excitement and cohesion of a mercenary squad.

FINDING A LEMMING

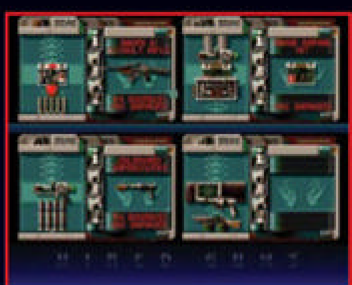
8 Oh no! Even these critters managed to make their way in, but only in the short challenge levels. Although more aggressive and less suicidal, blasting one straight in the face does provide a strange sensation.

PUZZLE SOLVING

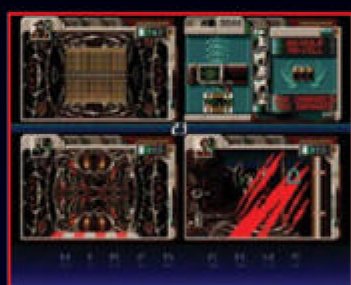
9 Graveyard is filled with conundrums during exploration which require you to bypass force fields, open locked doors and move blocks to open new paths, all whilst watching your back for bio-weapons.

VICTORY!

10 The *Hired Guns* campaign is one that tests your mettle. On completion of the last level, you are greeted with the sight of an explosion followed by each character ending. You did it! It's time to feel proud.



» [Amiga] You will need to manage your inventory as well as carrying capacity between your team.



» [Amiga] These short action challenge maps allow for more quick play sessions than extended adventure.

1993 when two important events happened. The first was *Doom*. Graphically it was a big leap forward when PCs were starting to overtake the Amiga in power, and even though it was a different style of game, it sucked up the press. The second event was *Frontier: Elite II* which had been in development for nine years and was possibly the most anticipated release on the Amiga ever. We were unlucky that it was released at the same time."

However, a few years later Devil's Thumb Entertainment (the American branch of DMA) began development on a *Hired Guns* follow up. "The idea was that it would be a remake, using modern technology in the form of the Unreal engine, rather than a sequel. By this time Scott had moved on so I was the game designer by default. At least to begin with, though this is considerably overstating that role," Steve tells us. But the fact that the licence didn't belong to the head branch of DMA Design caused complications. "I had the choice of either giving up my involvement, or quitting and going freelance to keep working on it, with the promise of more work after."

Unfortunately, this all turned sour quickly. "All of my universe was being eroded by the powers that be. To give you an example, one of the first things their in-house writer suggested was that Cheule have a glass plate in her forehead. My intro script was rejected for being - can you believe this? – 'too cinematic'". But the misguided ideas didn't stop there. "I was also told we needed a lot of one-liners. The CEO wanted three thousand. You heard that right. After all, if *Duke Nukem* had a dozen smartarse one-liners, *Hired Guns* should have three thousand. And he didn't want a female lead character. Right at the height of *Tomb Raider*'s fame he didn't want a female lead." Steve has the playable build (which can be found in the deep reaches of cyberspace) but has never tried it. "I can't bear to see what sort of damage they've done."

However, when asked about the subject of a re-make, Steve's enthusiasm has not waned. "I would love to be the equivalent of a writer/director or even just a scriptwriter. The best part would be integrating the story and background within the game itself rather than having it as a separate artefact in the shape of a manual. And then I would be able to tell you what happened next!" Unfortunately, no further action on the game has occurred as the licence belongs to Sony, due to Psygnosis becoming Sony Computer Entertainment Liverpool in 2001. "The fact that Sony hold the IP has held me back from doing anything in a serious manner. So Sony, how about it, eh? Now that is something with an absolute zero chance of happening!" Well Sony, would you like to prove him wrong? ★



» [Amiga] A DMA Design studio head described the unreleased sequel of *Hired Guns* as "okay". This is more than fair.

COMM

Run-and-gun games, baby. Everyone loves them, right? And Commando was one of the first, best, and most well-known. Graeme Mason looks back at this phenomenally successful game. Let's rush to area one, soldier!

Defining a run-and-gun game in order to discover the genre's origins is a hazardous exercise. For example, take the arcade classic *Bezerk*: you run, you gun; but would anyone consider it a member of the perennially popular type of game? Maybe, maybe not, but one game that clearly defines the genre is *Senjou No Ookami*, which literally translates as *Wolf Of The Battlefield* and there's not a hint of sheep's clothing, although the game was reskinned to the snappier *Commando* for western audiences. Whether this was to tie in with the movie of the same name has always been disputed, and certainly never admitted by anyone at Capcom. However, the shared name and theme (one man versus an army) certainly did the game no harm, especially when the movie became an outstanding hit on videocassette. But alternate names aside (and there will be more later), *Commando* remains a truly iconic game, taking the template laid down by forebears such as *Front Line* and refining the controls and gameplay so as to create an instant arcade classic.

Although *Commando* shared its name with a thematically-similar movie from the same year, it was undoubtedly earlier cinematic one-man-army capers such as *Missing In Action* and the first *Rambo* movie, *First Blood*, that were a more significant cultural influence.

> "The gameplay to Commando was as simple as it was infuriating"

Commando was released in arcades in 1985 by manufacturer Capsule Computers, better known as Capcom. It was the brainchild of designer Tokuro Fujiwara, who had already created the cute puzzler *Pirate Ship Higemaru* in 1984 and then the equally-iconic *Ghosts 'N' Goblins* in the same year, and the gameplay to *Commando* was as simple as it was infuriating. Playing the eponymous soldier, the player was deposited at the foot of the screen by an impressive-looking gunship helicopter, the surrounding trees shaking appropriately during its landing and take-off. Proceeding up the vertically-scrolling map, your character, Super Joe, faced practically an entire army in an unspecified mission, some on foot, others in tanks or on motorbikes. Armed with just a submachine gun (unlimited ammunition, but balanced with limited range) and a bag full of grenades, our valiant hero rushed from area to area, rescuing the odd prisoner of war and eliminating as many enemies as possible before he completed his two tours of duty and earned the right to a quick breather.

Obstacles included trenches (usually with soldiers hidden within), pillboxes, lookout towers and bridges while the enemy shot bullets, lobbed grenades and fired missiles at the lone hero. The gameplay was manic, incessant and rock-hard; yet *Commando* was a very popular title in the arcades despite, or maybe because, of its simplicity and



» [Arcade] Taking on a clutch of enemies at the airstrip.



» [Arcade] Super Joe jumps valiantly from the chopper.


» [Arcade] Several fiendish choke points await Super Joe such as this bridge and pillbox combo.

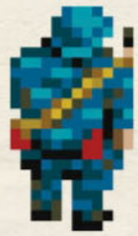


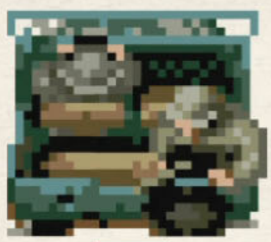
PIXEL PERFECT

If it moves shoot it. If it doesn't, shoot it anyway!


Bunker


Tower


Super Joe


Jeep


Motor Bike


Enemy Grunt


Rocket Soldier


Cowardly Commander


Mortar Soldier


Truck


Chopper


Grenade Boxes


Pill Box


Trench



» Elite Systems pulled out all the stops in getting its conversion promoted.



NIGEL ALDERTON

We find out how the Elite team squeezed the colourful and fast-paced coin-op into the ZX Spectrum

How did you come to land the job of working on these conversions?
I had decided I wanted to go freelance. Somehow I almost got in contact straightaway with Steve Wilcox [of Elite]. He offered me this contract as they were hiring people to work on the conversions and hired Keith Burkhill and myself to work on the Spectrum version. The folklore I have heard since is that Elite virtually bet the whole company on the game and if it didn't come out the coming Christmas, they would be in big trouble.

What were the terms like?
I think it was something like £10,000 as an upfront fee but there was a penalty of £1000 for every day we went over our deadline. The target was something like nine weeks, maybe ten, and it put us under a lot of pressure. But it gives you an idea of the kind of pressure that they were under as well.

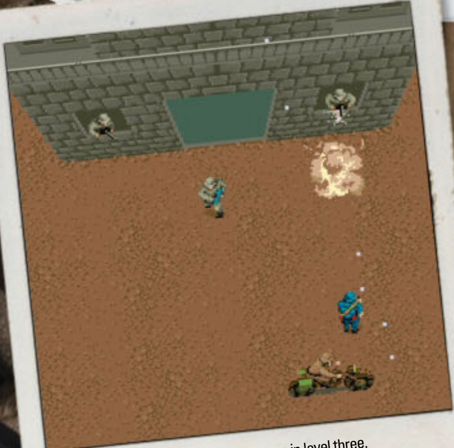
Did you know Keith?
Nope. We sat down on day one and said, look, we both know software takes twice as long as you think it's going to, so let's hit the ground running, work our butts off from the start so it won't be so hard at the end. So we had a strict regime from the start and the hours just got longer and longer. It was absolutely crazy.

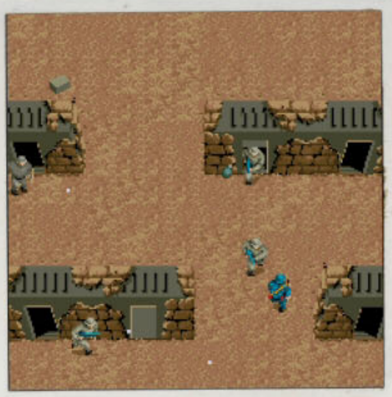
Where were you working from?
At Elite's office in Walsall. We were living in a little guest house called The Larches, just near the M6. We'd get up in the morning to go to the office, work morning, afternoon, dinner, evening, go back to the Larches, eat breakfast and then same again the next day. It was so intense it was mad.

What were you individual roles?
As I remember it, Keith did the logic for the men running around and the shooting, and I did the coding for the sprites to try and get the speed up. We copied the game by eye from a machine in Elite's office.

Did you look at the coin-op and wonder how the hell am I going to get this on a Spectrum?
Yes! But I'd learnt a few tricks about getting things working faster and faster and Keith knew his stuff. We realised the fastest way of changing memory, and therefore making the game quicker, was to push stuff onto the stack, put that on the screen and then it changes the screen. But you've got to be really careful when the 50th second refresh comes round to make sure the stack is off the screen or its gets interrupted, usually resulting in a crash.

£1000 question – did you make it on time?
We were two-and-a-half days late – but Steve didn't invoke the clause. We reckoned the threat had already done its job!


» [Arcade] Taking out the enemy fortress in level three.


» [Arcade] These mortars await Joe at the end of level three.

combination of vertically-scrolling shooter and contemporary military action movie. The game even eschewed end of level bosses, instead subjecting Super Joe to a torrent of enemies that all needed taking out before he could progress to the next level. To help him there was a smattering of bonus lives and copious boxes of grenades, carelessly strewn about the battlefield, the latter vital for taking out entrenched enemy positions and structures. Nevertheless, *Commando*'s difficulty ensured the game wasn't for everybody. Even getting through its first stage unscathed proved too tricky for many gamers, and it naturally became a voracious consumer of ten-pence pieces in arcades.

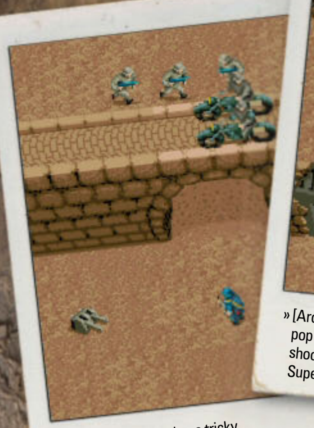
> "The gameplay was manic, incessant and rock-hard"

The success in the arcades meant home conversions were inevitable, and indeed the game received one of the largest amount of ports for an Eighties arcade machine. Leading the way in Europe was Walsall-based Elite Systems, a relatively small company that apocryphally risked its entire existence in producing several versions of the game in time for Christmas 1985. Elite, buoyed by the success of its *Airwolf* and *Frank Bruno* licences, beat off fierce competition from peers such as Ocean Software to acquire the rights to *Commando*. Elite's Steve Wilcox told **Retro Gamer** way back in issue 13 about his meeting with Capcom. "We initially offered £25,000 but I said let's make the offer based on 100,000 units with a royalty rate of 65 pence per unit. So the offer instantly upped to £65,000! After a couple of nervous hours we were escorted to a lawyer's office and the deal was done that very same day."

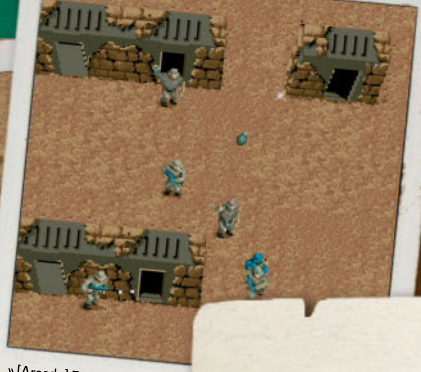
Elite succeeded, trumping Ocean's *Commando*-esque *Rambo* game, although the standard varied wildly between the various versions, perhaps unsurprisingly considering the fast pace of the original. Elite's conversions also resulted in another name change as the game was given a sci-fi theme and the title *Space Invasion* for the German release. Out went human soldiers and in came chrome robots, glistening incongruously against the jungle background.

The variation of conversion standards did little to affect sales – figures released by Capcom in 2009 indicated the franchise lay 13th in its overall list of top sellers, and even makes the top five if you take an average for each titles rather than total number of games sold. Riding on this success, Elite planned a sequel of its own, imaginatively entitled *Commando 2*, then *Commando '86* and *Commando '87*. The game was





» [Arcade] Many of these tricky bridges await Super Joe.



» [Arcade] Enemy soldiers pop out of these bunkers to shoot and lob grenades at Super Joe.

oft-delayed and it was finally released as part of its *Hit Pak* compilation in 1987. Ultimately, it bears more resemblance to another arcade game, *Gauntlet*, rather than the classic Capcom run-and-gunner that we love.

Despite its success in the arcades and at home, *Commando* did not receive an official sequel until 1990, although its influence was clearly being felt thanks to games such as the western-themed *Gunsmoke*. Now revealed as part of a covert mercenary team known as Wolf Force, Super Joe was joined by two other soldiers as they went to rescue the president of the fictional country of Zutula who had been captured by rebels in the rather excellent Mercs. A third game, Wolf Of The Battlefield: Commando 3, was released in 2008.

Commando's popularity can be somewhat bemusing. Similar games of the age such as *Green Beret*, *Ikari Warriors*, and *Contra* all featured power-ups and useable vehicles. Yet *Commando* was the first major game of its type and the others all took some cue from its gameplay or design. It was released at a time when action movies were proving especially popular with cinema-goers and was an instantly accessible piece of arcade gaming. So maybe it shouldn't be so surprising after all, and whatever your interpretation of run-and-gun is, *Commando* is an outstanding example of the genre – and possibly its most famous.

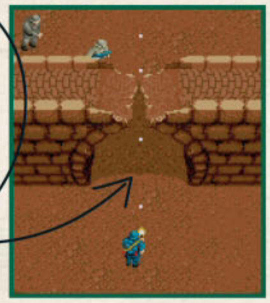


» [Arcade] Complete an area and Super Joe took a quick break before moving on.

PLAYING TIPS

Become a Super Joe yourself with this handy guide

1 These dastardly bridges crop up regularly in the game and can cause big problems if you don't time your approach. Enemies often mass above, ready to pounce; a well-timed grenade is a must here.





2 Early on, Joe encounters a captured colleague accompanied by two guards escorting him back to base. Take out the guards to save your pal and you net yourself 1000 point bonus as a thank you gift.

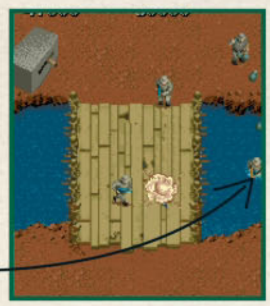
3 These armoured pillboxes take two grenades to destroy which exposes Joe to an unhealthy amount of enemy attention. Unless you're desperate for points, best to avoid its fire and slip past.





4 Each level sees Joe take on a horde of enemy soldiers that emerge from all directions. Best chance our hero has is to keep moving and spray lead, but he needs a fair amount of luck too.

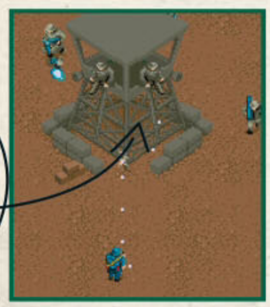
5 Enemy soldiers often lurk in rivers and can only be taken out with a grenade. However, not taking the time to do this can result in trouble if you are caught on the bridges.





6 Don't be afraid to lob grenades up at these fellows hiding behind rocks as there are usually plenty of spare ones left around by helpful enemies.

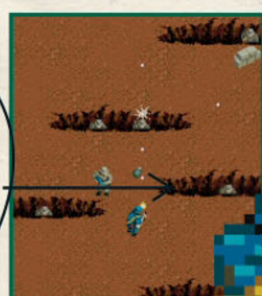
7 Don't try and do what Joe is doing here and attack these towers – it's a waste of time as they're indestructible, or certainly not worth the effort.





8 Local topography in the early levels includes plenty of helpful trees to lurk behind for brief respite from the battle. Don't stay for too long though; you're still vulnerable to grenades.

9 By level two you'll be confronted with these infernal trenches with enemies popping up to take shots at you. Best tactic is to pick a side and lob a few grenades before moving up quickly.

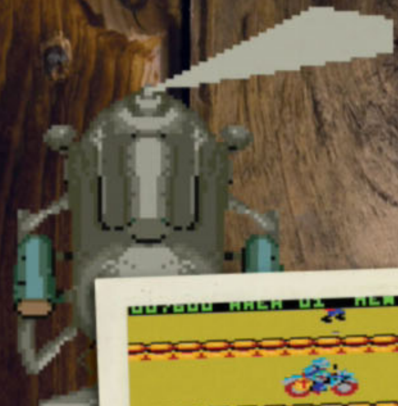




10 While technically these vehicles can be destroyed, they are better avoided given their touch is deadly to Joe. Quick reflexes are the order of the day as they zoom in from above and the side.

CONVERSIONS

All the versions that appeared before the arcade perfect PlayStation and Saturn ports arrived



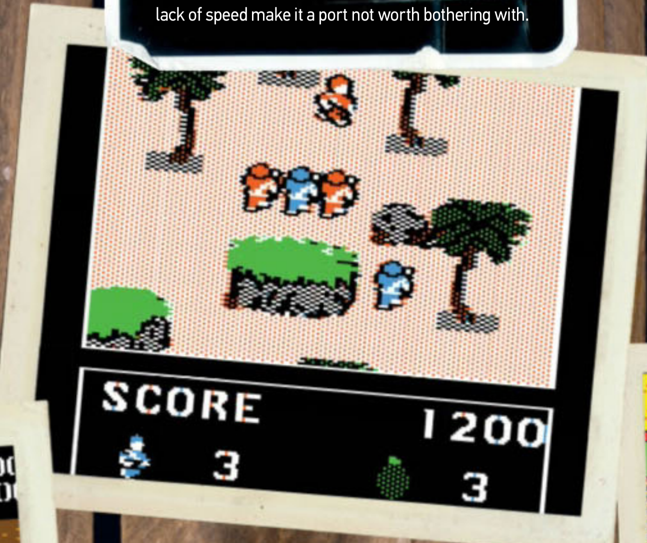


AMSTRAD CPC

■ Despite being inevitably based on the ZX Spectrum game, this Amstrad CPC version is actually a pretty decent effort with a nice recreation of the famous tune and crisp graphics. Only some ropey scrolling lets the game down slightly.

APPLE II

■ With its stippled graphics and vastly compacted screen, the Apple II version of *Commando* leaves much to be desired. No sound effects beyond a few squeaks and most critically a lack of speed make it a port not worth bothering with.





ATARI 2600

■ Converting a modern, fast-paced arcade game to the antiquated 2600 was always going to be a stretch and unsurprisingly it bore little resemblance either graphically or in terms of gameplay. Best avoided.



ATARI 7800

■ One of the better home versions, the 7800 port was not only one of just two games to use a special cartridge-based sound chip, it also featured extras such as a bullet-pumping machine gun power up and a knife for close encounters.

ATARI ST

■ Although accurate in terms of graphics and sound, the genre was beginning to look stale by the time Elite produced *Commando* for the Atari ST. But despite mediocre reviews, it's actually a faithful conversion.





BBC MICRO/ELECTRON

■ Oh dear. While the green jungle of *Commando* may have suited the BBC and Electron palette, stuttering scrolling and a stultifying lack of speed hamstrung the game terminally. The worst of the 8-bit home computer ports.



COMMODORE AMIGA

■ Like the Atari ST, the Amiga version of *Commando* boasted the most accurate graphics and sound of all the home versions. Life as Super Joe on the Amiga was extremely tough, however, and the misjudged difficulty curve ruined the game for many.



COMMODORE 16, PLUS/4

■ Another valiant effort and a quite different game. Akin more to *Who Dares Wins* than *Commando*, the C16 had no scrolling and only five screens, with the task to eliminate all enemies before rushing to the next. Not a bad game considering the hardware, but not really *Commando*.



PC-88

■ The NEC PC-88 home computer received a port of Commando that would probably be quite playable if you could stand the migraine-inducing background graphics for more than five minutes.



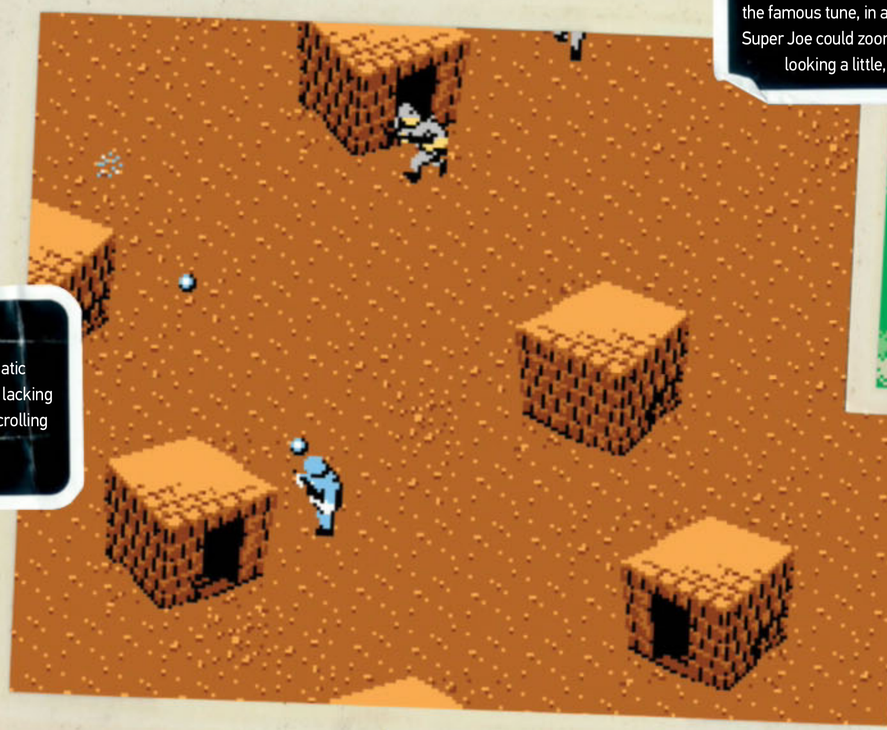
COMMODORE 64

■ Probably the best of the 8-bit home computer versions, the C64 of course included a faithful and swizzy recreation of the famous tune, in addition to some very fast-paced action. Super Joe could zoom around the screen very nicely despite looking a little, well, shorter than in the original.



MSX

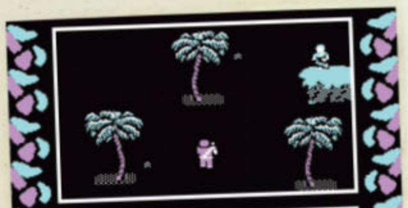
■ Although it bravely emulates the initial cinematic helicopter drop (and fails badly), the MSX version is lacking graphically and in terms of gameplay, with jerky scrolling and a complete lack of playability.





INTELLIVISION

■ After having bought out the Intellivision brand and technology in 1987, INTV Corp produced several ambitious arcade conversions on the eight-year old machine. While recreating the famous tune, the rest of the game is not up to scratch, with Joe seemingly trapped in a pit of quicksand.

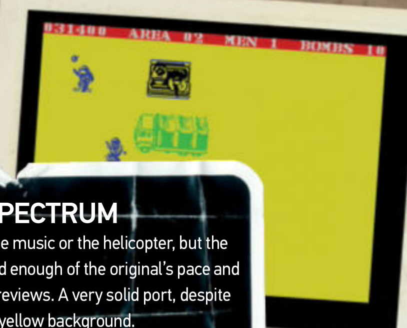


PC-DOS

■ Looking very much like the early PC-DOS game it was, *Commando* on the PC contained music that could thankfully be turned off, slow jerky gameplay and enemies that looked they were practicing their breast stroke having been shot by Super Joe.

NES

■ Along with the Commodore 64 and Atari 7800, one of the better home versions, and another that expands upon the original with extra pickups and underground areas with bonus items. It plays at a fair lick, too, with the only downside some flickery sprites.



ZX SPECTRUM

■ It may not have had the music or the helicopter, but the Spectrum version retained enough of the original's pace and excitement to gain rave reviews. A very solid port, despite the garish yellow background.





TEKKEN 2

» RETROREVIVAL

BRUCE LEE OR JACKIE CHAN? THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT: FIGHT!

» PLAYSTATION » NAMCO » 1995

Once upon a time Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan sparred in *Enter The Dragon*. Okay, sparred isn't exactly the right word as Bruce played the hero of the film and Jackie was one of many hired goons he beat up. Despite his brief dalliance with the legendary martial artist, it remains one of Jackie Chan's favourite memories and it's stayed with many other people too, presenting a tantalising 'what if' that may have been expanded upon if Bruce hadn't met such a tragic, early end.

Thankfully those wonderful developers at Namco made this daydream a digital reality when it unleashed *Tekken 2* in 1995. Namco had already put the fight to end all fights into motion with the introduction of the Bruce Lee inspired Marshall Law in the original *Tekken* – a tough no-nonsense fighter with a love of flamboyant moves and trousers that didn't come with matching tops. The grudge match finally came to fruition with the arrival of *Tekken 2*. One of the eight fighters that Namco introduced this time round was a famed street cop called Lei Wulong, who bore more than a striking resemblance to a certain Jackie Chan.

Needless to say, most of my battles against friends always revolved around playing with the two fighters. I never really got on with Lei Wulong's fighting style, so would typically play as Marshall Law, mentally expanding upon that fight I'd witnessed so many years before. While later *Tekken* games would expand on this scrap with the introduction of more realistic moves and superior aesthetics, the superb PlayStation conversion will always remain my favourite. *

SEGA GAME GEAR

25 YEARS ON

Sega was slow to get into gear during the portable console race, and arrived to market behind Atari and Nintendo. Join Nick Thorpe to find out how Sega's machine never quite reached top speed…

One of the interesting things about Sega was its belief in hitting the market early. The SG-1000, the very first console that the company manufactured, launched in the same month as the Famicom. Later, it would launch the Saturn early in an attempt to stifle Sony's PlayStation launch, and it kicked the following generation off very early with the Dreamcast. However, when handheld consoles began to hit the market in the late Eighties, Sega was caught flat-footed. Nintendo launched its Game Boy in April 1989, and the console quickly became a huge craze thanks to titles like *Tetris* and *Super Mario Land*. Atari introduced the Lynx in the autumn of that same year, attempting to capture the market with a powerful full colour system. Sega didn't have a response ready for either machine, and quickly set about putting one together.

In order to get the machine to market quickly, Sega built a backlit colour handheld console based on the Master System – it was technically almost identical, with two key differences regarding graphics handling. The first of these was a low-resolution mode which matched the 160x144 output of the Game Boy, though it could also utilise the Master System's 256x192 mode. The second was the upgraded colour palette – where the Master System could display 32 colours from a palette of 64, the Game Gear could display 32 from a palette of 4096. The resulting system was very much the middle man of the pack – it was bigger, more expensive and more battery hungry than the Game Boy but more impressive to look at, and cheaper than the Lynx.

The choice of the Master System as a basis for the system's capabilities allowed developers to get to grips with the machine easily, as the ▶





» The Game Gear's circular D-pad is similar to the Mega Drive one, but with a flatter, wider treatment for the main directions.



» Early models of the Game Gear feature flat screen covers. Later models adopted the more familiar 'bubble' shape.



» The two-button controls of the Master System were retained, though some games pulled in Start as a third button.



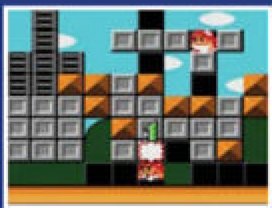
"The display window was smaller, but basically games were developed cross platform"

Dominic Wood



POCKET PERFECTION

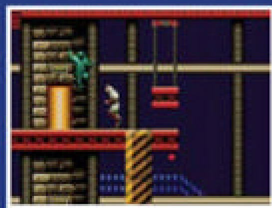
Five essential exclusives for Sega's handheld



POPILS: THE BLOCKBUSTING CHALLENGE

■ Tengen ■ 1991

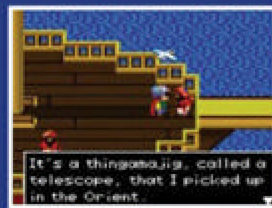
This puzzler is the final game designed by Fukio Mitsuji, better known for *Bubble Bobble* and *Rainbow Islands*. It's a challenge, requiring you to break blocks to rescue a princess. With 100 stages and a great level editor, Popils will keep you occupied for a long time.



SHINOBI II: THE SILENT FURY

■ Sega ■ 1992

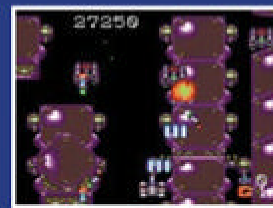
The original *Shinobi* title for the Game Gear was ace, and this sequel retains its best feature – the ability to play as the forever grateful ninjas that you have rescued along the way, each of which boasted their own unique skills. The improved visuals and level design give *Shinobi II* the slight but distinct edge over its predecessor.



DEFENDERS OF OASIS

■ Sega ■ 1992

While the Game Gear doesn't have a huge number of RPGs, it does have quite a few good ones. The desert-themed *Defenders Of Oasis* is one of the best, managing to provide enough depth to satisfy players while respecting the handheld format, ensuring that players can make good progress during quick Sessions.



POWER STRIKE II

■ Compile ■ 1993

It's hard to imagine a full-fledged shoot-'em-up being crammed onto the Game Gear's 3.2 inch screen, but Compile managed it – the amount of carnage packed in this shooter is impressive. It's not cheap, but it doesn't reach the exorbitant prices of the Master System game, which shares only its name and developer with the Game Gear version.



ARENA

■ Eden Entertainment Software ■ 1995

This visually impressive isometric action game challenges you to escape deadly mazes, while being hunted by enemy robots and soldiers. You will need to keep up the pace, as while it is possible to shoot your enemies, you'll often fare far better by dodging them unless you've picked up some good old power-ups.

▶ differences between the Master System and Game Gear proved to be fairly minor. "There's not much in it to be honest," explains Dominic Wood, a former Probe coder who later formed Syrox Developments, who worked as programmer for popular Game Gear titles including *The Terminator*, *The Jungle Book* and *The Lion King*. "The display window was smaller, but basically games were developed cross platform, with code to make sure important stuff like scores and lives indicators were moved into the smaller screen real estate." The development environment was a boon, as console manufacturers weren't in the habit of providing developer support at the time.

The Game Gear launched in Japan on October 6th 1990, retailing at ¥19,800. Despite the ease with which games could be converted to the new handheld, it was accompanied by just three games at launch: *Columns*, *Pengo* and *Super Monaco GP*. The key game was *Columns*, which served as Sega's analogue to *Tetris* – not only was it a similarly addictive puzzle game, it would also go on to become a long-serving bundled game. Though early sales were brisk, further software support was slow to arrive and the early units were prone to certain defects.

After a slow start in Japan, the system gathered steam throughout 1991. The year saw a number of third party publishers join the Game Gear ranks including Namco, Taito and Compile, and the system received its international launches, arriving in the US test markets of New York and Los Angeles in April for $149.99 and Europe in June for £99.99. Following on from its successful confrontational marketing with the Genesis, Sega Of America adopted a similarly combative approach with the Game Gear, declaring in its initial advert "If you're still playing with Game Boy, it's time to grow up."

The system received one of its best peripherals late in the year thanks to a company called Kalplus, which had developed an adaptor that enabled Master System cartridges to be played on the Game Gear. Although it wasn't compatible with a few titles including *OutRun*, this device was licensed by Sega and sold as an official accessory, giving the system access to a huge range of existing software. Late in the year, the arrival of Sega's new mascot *Sonic The Hedgehog* gave the system a quality platform game and some star power, rounding off a good year.

Despite all of this, Sega found itself unable to match the sales of the Game Boy. Nintendo's head start in all regions had helped it to establish the system early on, and *Tetris* was an incredible bundled game. The Game Boy was also far more portable than Sega's machine, able to last far longer on fewer batteries, and it also had more third party developers on board, including major companies such as Konami and Capcom. But while Sega struggled to match the universal appeal of *Tetris*, it was at least able to establish a clear lead over the Atari Lynx. Sega's ability to attract third party developers outstripped that of its American rival, and its appeal was beggining to grow at a rapid rate due to the success of the Mega Drive, and it was able to spend more on marketing its machine.



» The Game Gear's requirement for six AA batteries meant that they had to be spread across two compartments.

The result of this market performance was that the Game Gear settled into a different market placement over 1992. Japanese third parties became particularly unenthusiastic about the Game Gear and drastically reduced their support for the machine, but Western publishers were convinced of the platform's value – albeit as a supporting part of a multiplatform strategy, rather than a lead platform for development. In practice, this meant that the system's line-up became heavily populated by conversions of major hits from the arcade and other consoles. From an outsider's perspective these projects may have seemed like easy pickings, but for developers working with hardware that fundamentally dated back to the mid-Eighties, adapting the latest hits from more capable platforms often proved to be a headache.

"The Game Gear didn't have sprite mirroring, so you either had to store all the sprites facing left and right reducing your game size by 50%, or increase the size of your game cartridges by 50%," Dominic recalls. However, a bug with the system allowed him to mitigate this problem, "There was a delay when accessing the video memory which slowed down animation, so we used this extra time delay to mirror the data when the new animation frame was loaded, so in fact, the issue with the system design could be utilised for good. Not everyone worked this out – I can remember visiting Sega Of America's studio that ran all their Game Gear projects and they hadn't worked it out, as they were storing all the *Sonic Spinball* graphics twice."

Some projects also proved to be rather more demanding than others, as Dominic remembers, "I converted *Lemmings*, which got something like 94% in the top mags. It was a very technical challenge having to replicate a destructible world created in a bitmap to a character based system. For every pixel that was added or deleted I had to create a new customised character with limited video memory, and when that ran out I had to check for characters with only a few pixels and replace them with blanks to free up the memory. [It was] all very technical." While Sega's documentation and support for coders wasn't extensive, Dominic remembers the QA team being rather thorough, "A day before production, the Sega Of Japan QA team pointed out that the Lemmings should only test for collisions from their feet to waist and we had it going to their heads – no way could we change the code and then re-make all the maps playable in 24 hours…"

The Game Gear's position as a machine which primarily hosted conversions and multiplatform releases also gave it something of a marketing problem. While existing Game Gear owners couldn't complain of not getting big-name software, the rarity of high quality exclusives gave potential buyers little cause to pick up the machine. Game Gear advertising often glossed over the software line-up, instead focusing on the colour display. In North America, where Sega's marketing strategy was generally confrontational to begin with, the Game Gear advertising campaigns became particularly aggressive. Notably, Game Boy owners were portrayed as stupid – one particular TV spot depicted a Game Boy player hitting himself in the head with a dead squirrel in a futile attempt to see colour. "If you were colorblind and had an IQ less than twelve then you wouldn't care which portable you had," claimed a print ad which pictured the rival machines alongside a dog. "Of course you wouldn't care if you drank from the toilet either," it concluded. It was remarkable, in that Sega's previous anti-Nintendo advertising had focused on the opposing hardware – taking aim at the players themselves harder to swallow and it was, well, just mean.



» If your screen looks off, this contrast dial should solve your problem. If not, you've likely got faulty capacitors.



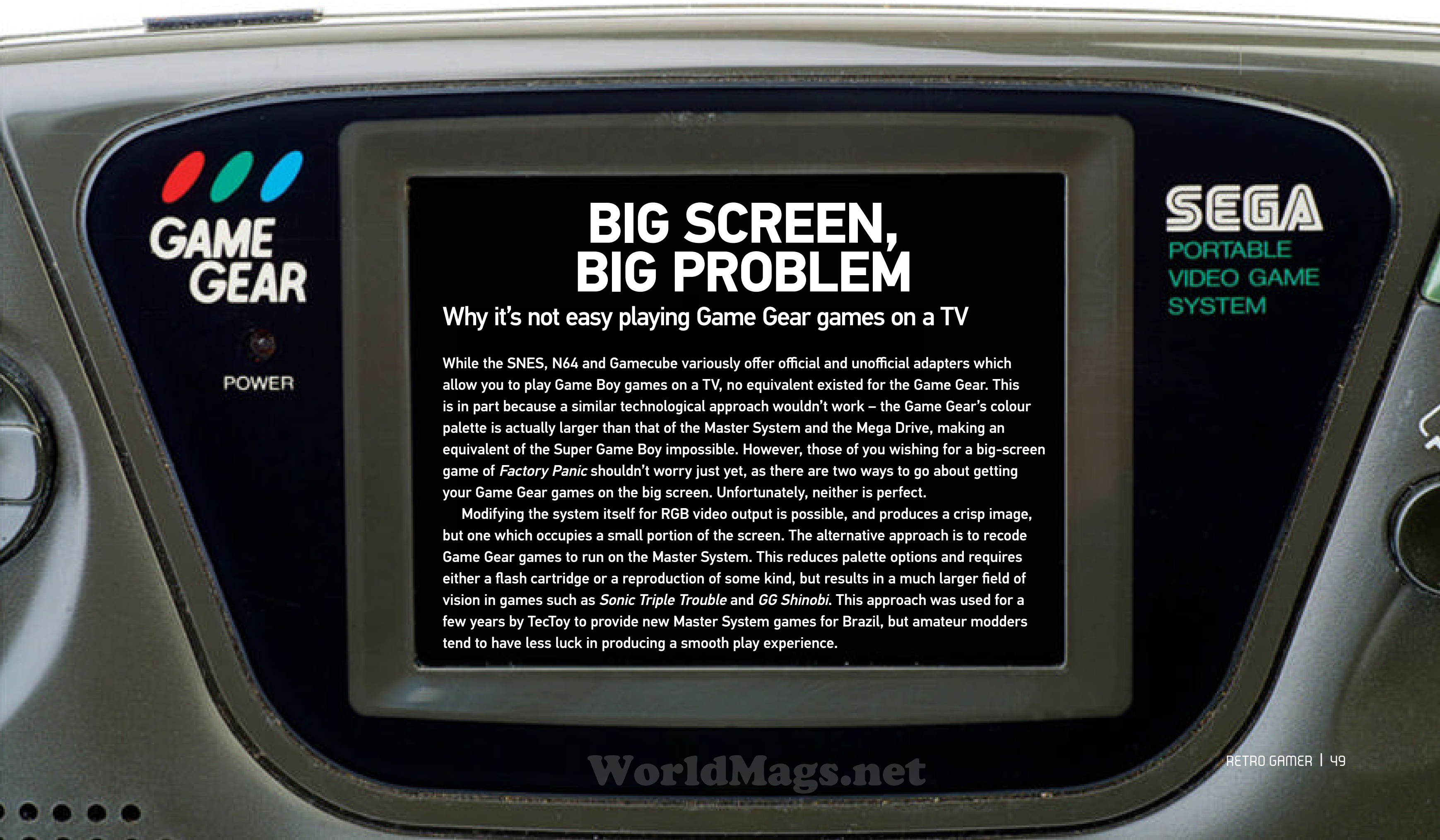
» The power light area is key to finding Majesco Game Gear consoles - if the logo is monochrome, it's Majesco.

> **"Sega struggled to match the universal appeal of Tetris"**
>
> The Game Gear lacked the Game Boy's killer app

Still, the system had stabilised into its long-term market position. The system continued to receive solid support over the next few years and amassed a formidable library of well-known games – lots of *Sonic* titles, *Mortal Kombat*, *Micro Machines*, *Ecco The Dolphin*, *NBA Jam*, and more. In Japan, where the system had been having the most trouble, a software surge was observed in 1994 and 1995. This was in part due to increased first-party production and a little extra support from existing third parties, but also helped massively by the support of Acclaim, a market newcomer which provided as much software to the Japanese market as every other third party combined during those two years. Games such as *Garfield: Caught In The Act* were pushing the boundaries of the hardware by using large eight megabit cartridges.

However, the Game Gear was beginning to near the end of its natural shelf life and the technology behind it, having been based on a 1985 design, was looking a little long in the tooth. If the machine had struggled with adaptations of Mega Drive games, it had no chance of coping with the 3D games that were becoming popular on home consoles – and if the Game Gear couldn't handle conversions, its reason for being was greatly diminished.

In Japan, a new approach was implemented to circumvent this issue, as both Nintendo and Sega were attempting to refocus their handheld platforms towards younger children during 1996. Nintendo's move came naturally, with the *Pokémon* phenomenon arriving in February and growing throughout the year. Sega's effort involved a rebranding, with the machine now promoted as Kid's Gear. This effort was kicked off with a special edition console bundle featuring *Virtua Fighter Mini*, an ambitious version of the hit fighting game based on the TV anime of the time. However, the effort only lasted nine months



BIG SCREEN, BIG PROBLEM

Why it's not easy playing Game Gear games on a TV

While the SNES, N64 and Gamecube variously offer official and unofficial adapters which allow you to play Game Boy games on a TV, no equivalent existed for the Game Gear. This is in part because a similar technological approach wouldn't work – the Game Gear's colour palette is actually larger than that of the Master System and the Mega Drive, making an equivalent of the Super Game Boy impossible. However, those of you wishing for a big-screen game of *Factory Panic* shouldn't worry just yet, as there are two ways to go about getting your Game Gear games on the big screen. Unfortunately, neither is perfect.

Modifying the system itself for RGB video output is possible, and produces a crisp image, but one which occupies a small portion of the screen. The alternative approach is to recode Game Gear games to run on the Master System. This reduces palette options and requires either a flash cartridge or a reproduction of some kind, but results in a much larger field of vision in games such as *Sonic Triple Trouble* and *GG Shinobi*. This approach was used for a few years by TecToy to provide new Master System games for Brazil, but amateur modders tend to have less luck in producing a smooth play experience.





» Game Gear cartridges are compact and feature a pronounced ridge, allowing easy removal from the system.

TURN ON, TUNE IN

The appeal of the system's flagship add-on

One of the most desirable add-ons for the Game Gear was the TV Tuner, a fantastic novelty which granted the ability to watch TV through your handheld console. It cost only a little less than buying a separate handheld TV, but instantly made you the envy of all your friends. Sadly, due to the rise of digital TV broadcasting, the TV Tuner is almost fully obsolete today, unless you happen to be visiting one of the countries still broadcasting analogue signals appropriate for your tuner's region settings. The result of this is that the accessory can now be acquired for a little under £10, a fraction of the high value it held for so long.

While the TV Tuner is no longer capable of its primary function, it's still possible to make some use of it as the rarely-used 3.5mm port on top of the device is actually a connector for AV cables. If you're in possession of the required adapter it's possible to use the Game Gear as a portable monitor for any device which outputs composite video. This means that it's entirely possible to run DVD players and camcorders through the Game Gear, as well as a wide variety of games consoles from the Master System and NES to the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3. Just make sure you've got a lot of spare batteries on hand, and don't try it if you've got a Majesco-manufactured Game Gear – the TV Tuner is incompatible with the device.

as games such as *Puzzle Bobble*, *Panzer Dragoon Mini* and the *Pet Club* series failed to inspire an upturn in the system's fortunes. *G-Sonic*, known elsewhere as *Sonic Blast*, was the final game released for the system in Japan when it arrived in December 1996. Outside of Japan, the system was similarly dead. *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* arrived in August 1997 to coincide with the blockbuster film, but it was the system's only release of the year.

That wasn't quite the end for the Game Gear though, thanks to a company called Majesco. In the late Nineties, Majesco had established a healthy business relationship with Sega by licensing the Genesis hardware and keeping it available as a budget alternative to the PlayStation and N64. Attempting to repeat this success, Majesco acquired a licence from Sega to manufacture the Game Gear and reintroduced it to the North American market as a budget machine in 2001. The new hardware retailed at $29.99 and it featured some minor differences, including a monochrome logo, cheaper plastic and a slightly improved LCD screen. Ten games were made available, priced at $14.97.

While all of the games were old developments, *Super Battletank* had never actually been released before and it became the final official release for the system when it accompanied the relaunched machine. Other original developments were also promised to the masses, but they ultimately failed to materialise.

> **"It was better to play with but that didn't equate to commercial success"**
> Dominic Wood

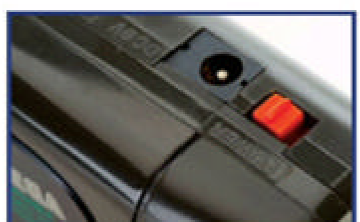
Since the machine left the market, the main challenge for avid Game Gear collectors has been the high long-term failure rate of the machine. Due to widespread problems with capacitors manufactured during the Game Gear's lifetime, the capacitors used in the machine are prone to leaking, causing a variety of problems including contrast issues and a loss of sound. While the problem can be fixed by those with soldering skills, there's a likelihood that if you find a Game Gear in the wild, it probably won't be working correctly. Thankfully for those of us that aren't technically inclined, there are people out there offering repair services.

The Game Gear has an unusual legacy. It was beaten by the Game Boy by a wide margin, for reasons Dominic sums up succinctly: "The power of Nintendo marketing and game IP, lower price point and longer battery life. The Game Gear was better to play with, but that didn't equate to commercial success." Its sales of 11 million, however, comfortably best any handheld not manufactured by Nintendo or Sony, and it achieved enough popularity to be supported fully for six years. On the other hand it seems to receive rather less love than Sega's other machines despite similar contemporary popularity, and even Sega didn't think the machine worthy of a successor – its last entry into the handheld market being the Nomad, essentially another Mega Drive model. In part, this is because of the machine's role as a counterpart to Sega's non-portable machines. While the Game Gear has excellent exclusive software, much of its library consists of games which are available on Master System, or are cut-down versions of Mega Drive games. The machine also suffers from a reputation problem as its bulky frame and poor battery are still the butt of jokes.

However, the beauty of retro gaming is that our favourite platforms can be improved upon over time. Being a Game Gear fan today isn't the same experience as being a Game Gear fan back in the early Nineties. Battery life need no longer be a major concern, whether you choose to remedy that with a power supply or an LED backlight modification. Similarly, all of the exclusive software is documented and available, and the range of accessible games is growing thanks to the efforts of fan translators, who have made Japan-only games such as *Royal Stone* available in English.

So while the Game Gear has its detractors, it should be noted that it's by no means a bad machine – it's just one which suffered from the limitations of its time. We're sure that fans don't need to be told how much fun the machine can be, but if you've never tried the it, and you've been put off by the negativity, we'd urge you to take another look at the system. Its faults can be resolved, and its weaknesses can be improved on. Once that's sorted, you can enjoy the games that never received the recognition they deserve. *





» As well as regular AC cables, Sega offered battery packs and car adaptors to mitigate poor battery life.

MINIATURE MAKEOVERS

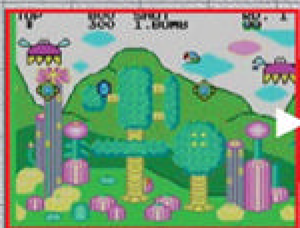
Five games that prove that Game Gear games weren't always identical to their Master System counterparts



OUTRUN

■ With the Game Gear version of *OutRun* arriving four years after the Master System version, the decision was made to start over and deliver a new version of the popular game. Graphics and music have been completely redone, an automatic transmission mode was added and there's an all-new rival race mode.





FANTASY ZONE

■ While the Master System game was closely based on the arcade version of *Fantasy Zone*, the Game Gear version diverged from it to introduce new enemies and stages. These do a great job of showing off the Game Gear's expanded colour palette, which makes it a far more cheerful looking game than the Master System offering.





SPACE HARRIER

■ *Space Harrier*'s Game Gear conversion is an extremely weird one, offering fewer stages than its Master System counterpart and adding a password system in order to resume the game. All of the enemies have been redrawn to look more organic, too. An interesting oddity that completists will certainly want in their collections.

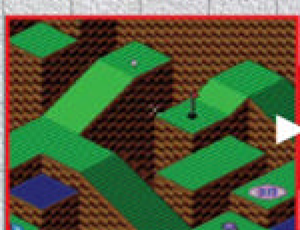




NINJA GAIDEN

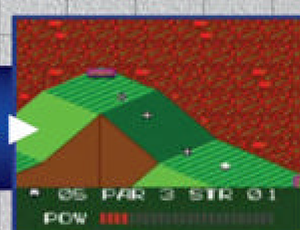
■ The Game Gear version of *Ninja Gaiden* was developed by Japan System House and released in 1991. It's competent but dull. For some reason, the 1992 Master System version was developed by SIMS. It was completely different and miles better. We're not sure why this happened, but we recommend sticking with the Master System original.





PUTT & PUTTER

■ SIMS developed both versions of *Putt & Putter*, and they're similar to look at and to play. However, the Game Gear version, which came out first in 1991, has a totally different set of levels to the Master System version released in 1992. It's another clear example that the Game Gear didn't t suffer from as many Master System ports as gamers thought.





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Sirius Software

The early Eighties was a turbulent time for videogaming, it went from boom to bust almost overnight with many notable companies hitting the wall. While not the most well known of these, Sirius Software certainly presents one of the most interesting stories. Kieren Hawken discovered why

The Sirius Software story starts with just two people – Jerry Jewell and Nasir Gebelli, an Iranian national who had moved to the US in 1980 to study computer science. Both owners of the popular Apple II computer, they first met at a local user group as Jerry, who at the time was the sales manager at ComputerLand in Sacramento, explains: "I was working on a graphics editing package named E-Z Draw and was active in the local AppleSac user's group. I met Nasir at the club and he helped me write the ellipse drawing routine. I then thought it needed a cool slide show for the retailers to put what they created in the windows of their store. Nasir wrote the slide show program and we bundled it with E-Z Draw." So now they just needed to find a market for their product. As a salesman himself Jerry was not afraid to go the extra mile, "I travelled the state selling E-Z Draw on consignment to Apple retailers. We also licensed and included the graphical text generator from Synergistic Software, which made E-Z Draw the first ever program to do page layout, graphics and custom fonts in both colour and different sizes. It took years before anyone else could do that, just bragging!" And the stage was set for Sirius Software to come into existence, they had their first program and a retailer network interested in their product, so what next?

The videogames market was really taking off around this time and it seemed like a next logical step for them, as Jerry details: "Nasir then wrote the cute game combo *Both Barrels*. So we also started selling that, and, by that time, we had a good following amongst the Apple dealers. I went on vacation for a few days and when I returned Nasir showed me his newest creation, *Space Eggs*, "which he had hammered out in just a couple of days!" Nasir's seemingly amazing ability to churn out not just games, but really good ones, meant that Jerry would have to take their partnership more seriously. "The sales started to rocket," Jerry enthuses, "and my job at ComputerLand became a conflict. So I struck a deal with Terry Bradshaw, the owner, to let our new business run out of the store. We used the store computers and their facility at night for production. Terry was then half partner and Nasir was paid by royalties on his games"

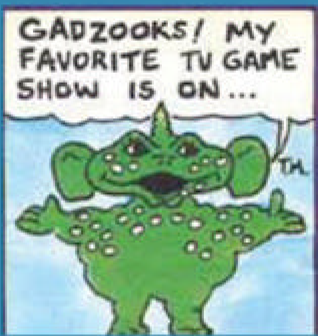
Nasir Gebelli was quickly building himself a big reputation in the industry. He was producing as many as twelve games in a year and they were all hitting



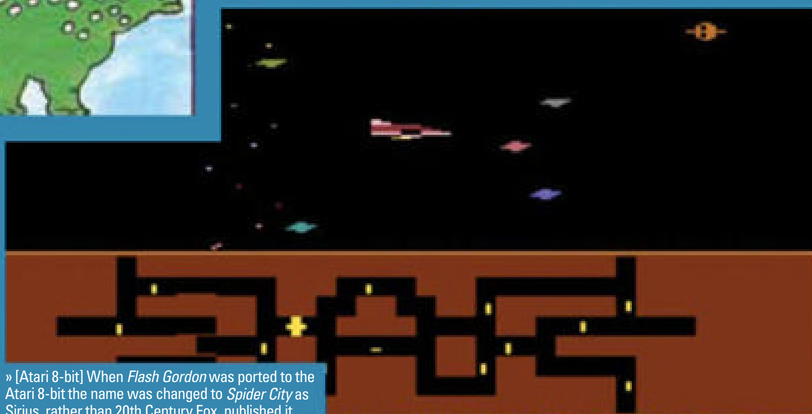
» [DOS] *Call To Arms* was a rare outing into the strategy genre for Sirius, it was also one of its first PC compatible games.

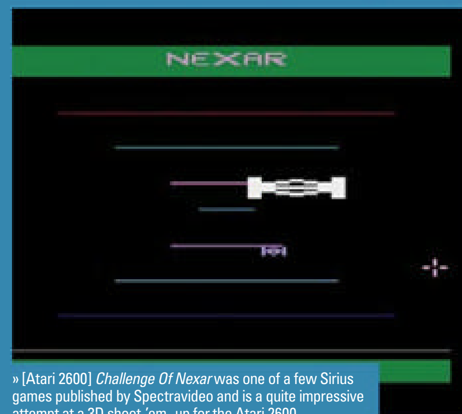
IN THE KNOW

- Sirius Software designed and programmed over 160 games in its extremely short lifespan.
- Nasir Gebelli's Gorgon sold over 23,000 units, making it the best selling computer game of the time.
- It was one of the first companies to produce videogames officially licensed from Hollywood movies.
- The company produced games for the Apple II, Atari 8-bit, Commodore 64 and VIC-20, Atari 2600, Intellivision, Magnavox Odyssey 2, MSX and IBM PC among others.
- Sirius programmers included such luminaries as Mark Turmell, Chuck Sommerville, David Lubar and Tom McWilliams.
- Sirius Software's mascot 'The Alien From Sirius', one of the first for a games company, had cameo roles in many of its games.
- Nasir Gebelli was the first ever videogames programmer to be paid royalties.



"E-Z Draw was the first ever program to do page layout, graphics and custom fonts in both colour and different sizes. It took years before anyone else could do that, just bragging!" JERRY JEWELL

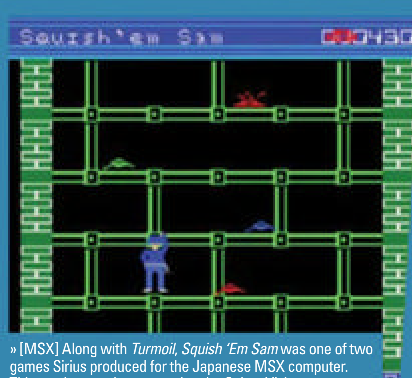

» [Atari 8-bit] When *Flash Gordon* was ported to the Atari 8-bit the name was changed to *Spider City* as Sirius, rather than 20th Century Fox, published it.



» [Atari 2600] *Challenge Of Nexar* was one of a few Sirius games published by Spectravideo and is a quite impressive attempt at a 3D shoot-'em- up for the Atari 2600.


» [Apple II] Although Nasir Gebelli left Sirius Software in 1981, the company still published some of his later games, including the rather spiffy *Defender* clone, *Gorgon*.


» [C64] Not to be confused with the BBC Micro game of the same name, *Repton* is a cool take on *Defender* by Andrew Kaluzniacki.



» [MSX] Along with *Turmoil*, *Squish 'Em Sam* was one of two games Sirius produced for the Japanese MSX computer. This version was later ported to the ColecoVision.



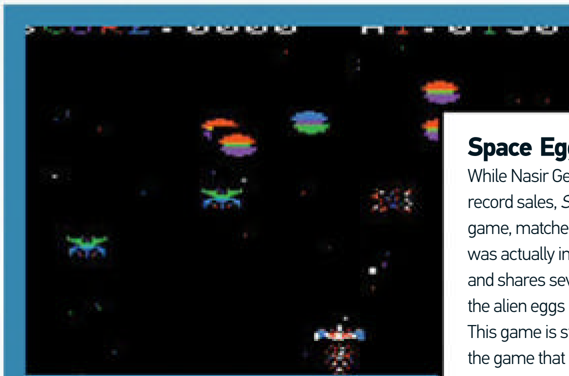


the top of the sales charts. One of his games, *Gorgon*, set new sales records for a home computer game in 1982 by selling an impressive 23,000 copies. So where did this leave Jerry in all of this? Even though he wasn't a games programmer he still had plenty to do. "I was involved personally on all the games as chief tester, marketer and editor on all of them. I picked the names, wrote the instructions, chose the cover art and much more. I recruited the talent and kept them all reasonably happy. Terry ran the business end, the accounting mostly." Sirius Software was up and running in full effect, Jerry had all his bases covered and a superstar programmer providing the goods. But things change quickly in the videogames industry and in late 1981 Nasir decided to leave Sirius to set up his own company, Gebelli Software. While there he developed the 1982 Apple II game *Horizon V*, which was one of the very first examples of an FPS on a home system. Sadly this venture did not work out well for Gebelli, and the games did not click they way like they had at Sirius. Three of his titles placed in the top ten worst games of 1983 in *Softline* magazine, and shortly afterwards his company went into receivership.

> "I said if they wanted me to drop out of college then I would expect to be paid what I would get starting out, which in 1983 would be about 20K. They hired me!" CHUCK SOMMERVILLE

When Nasir left the company, Jerry set about hiring a new team of superstar programmers. Among this hall of fame were Chuck "*Chip's Challenge*" Sommerville, Larry "*Enduro*" Miller, Dan "*NFL Blitz*" Thompson, Tom "*Rocket Ranger*" McWilliams, David "*Frogger 2*" Lubar and Mark "*NBA Jam*" Turmell. This team of talented individuals would cut their teeth at Sirius before going onto bigger and better things, rarely in gaming history will you find such a bunch of luminaries gathered in one place so how did Jerry do this exactly? "Well…" says Jerry, "That was my biggest talent, getting people to believe in my vision. The market was hungry and we were able to pull together these tremendously talented people and keep them focused and well fed!" Chuck had an interesting route into the company, writing his first game while still in full-time education. He recalls this time very well. "Sirius published my first game *Snake Byte*, which I wrote while I was a student at Georgia Tech. Then my Second game, *Gruds In Space*, was written as part of a work/study program while I took the winter quarter off. I wrote it with a friend, Joe Dudar, who had dropped out of Georgia Tech. Joe wrote the script and did the art and I did the programming. Sirius signed

Defining games



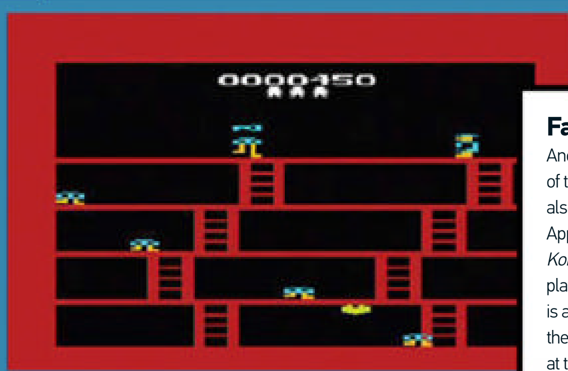
Space Eggs 1981

While Nasir Gebelli's *Gorgon* was the first game to go on to achieve record sales, *Space Eggs*, arguably the better and more impressive game, matched it by climbing to the top of the charts. The game itself was actually inspired by the popular Nichibutsu coin-op *Moon Cresta* and shares several key gameplay characteristics. The idea is to crack the alien eggs and then destroy what lurks within for bonus points. This game is still mentioned by many developers and coders as the game that got them into programming.



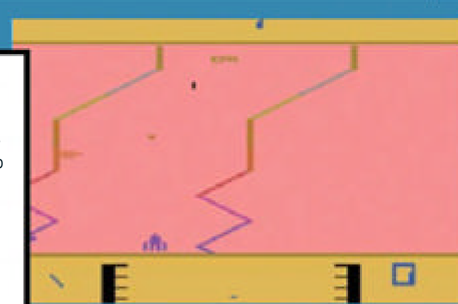
Turmoil 1982

It might not look much like it but Mark Turmell's superb *Turmoil* actually takes its inspiration from the classic Atari arcade game *Tempest*. The idea of the game is basically the same, but the 2D look sets it apart. Enemies attack from down the tubes to both your left and your right. Your craft can move vertically along the central cavern and fire in both directions. While some of the enemies are easy to take out, other require several hits and some can't be shot from the front and you must wait until they pass you to shoot them from behind.



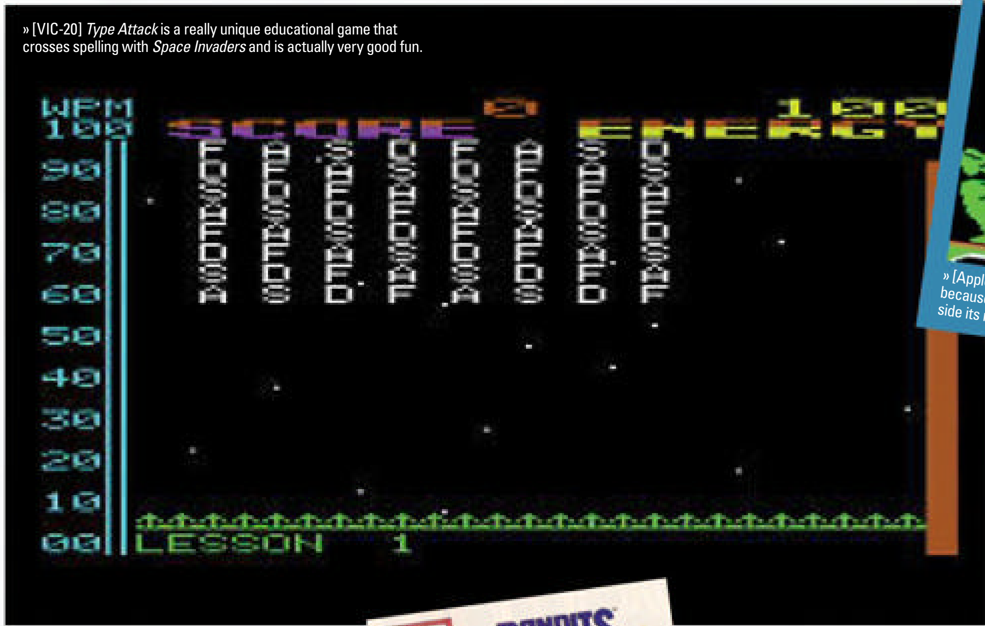
Fast Eddie 1982

Another title by Mark Turmell, *Fast Eddie* is not just one of the very first platform games on a home format but also reuses the titular Sneakers from an earlier Apple II game of his. Taking elements from *Donkey Kong* and *Space Panic*, two of the first arcade platformers, and combining them perfectly *Fast Eddie* is a lot of fun. The idea is to avoid the Sneakers, collect the items and then grab the key from the guardian at the top of the screen. As the levels increase the challenge gets harder and the gameplay even faster!

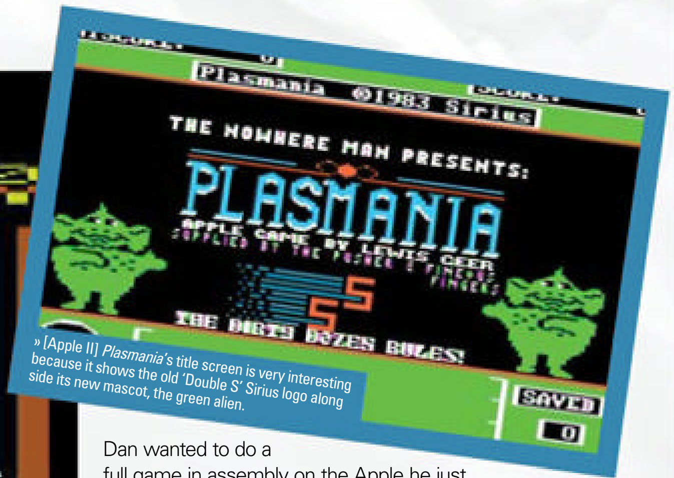


Fantastic Voyage 1982

Based on the classic 1966 movie of the same name this is Sirius' first film tie-in from the contract with 20th Century Fox. The game takes the form of a vertically scrolling shoot 'em up as you fly through a human body trying eliminate the blood clots. One of the most interesting features of this game is that you have to be careful just what you destroy, some of the things inside the body are needed, others are not and part of the game is working out which ones are beneficial. The Atari 2600 version is a particularly impressive achievement.



» [VIC-20] *Type Attack* is a really unique educational game that crosses spelling with *Space Invaders* and is actually very good fun.



» [Apple II] *Plasmania's* title screen is very interesting because it shows the old 'Double S' Sirius logo along side its new mascot, the green alien.

the paperwork, but I was living off the *Snake Byte* royalties and living in my home town in Huntington, West Virginia. During the following summer I went to California to port *Gruds In Space* over to the C64 and the Atari 8-bit. At the end of that summer Sirius offered me a full time job. I said if they wanted me to drop out of college then I would expect to be paid what I would get starting out, which in 1983 would be about 20K. They hired me!" David's journey to Sirius was a bit more direct, "I was working as an associate editor at *Creative Computing Magazine*. Sirius was looking for programmers to produce Atari 2600 cartridges so they called Mark Pelczarski, who was the head of Polarware. I'd worked with Mark on *The Graphics Magician* and Mark gave them my name. Larry Miller then called me to offer me a job, simple as that!"

Dan Thompson would later go on to make his name with Midway but his humble beginnings at Sirius also involved his childhood friend Andrew Kaluzniacki, who reminisces on this meeting. "I started hanging out at The Personal Computer Place in fifth grade when I was 11. It was one of the first computer stores in Arizona and was run by this amazing man, Roger Smith, who was happy enough to let me and another kid hang out after school and type programs from *Byte* and other magazines into SWTPC computers and helped us figure out how to debug them. The other kid was Danny Thompson, who was 14 at the time, and we became best friends. Part of Mr. Smith's business was assembling kits and selling them and as business improved he taught Dan and I to solder and assemble the kits. Dan saved to get an Apple II and he taught himself assembly. Naturally we spent much time in the arcades of the day, so when Dan wanted to do a full game in assembly on the Apple he just copied *Berzerk*. One summer day my mom suggested Dan and I go to some convention in Phoenix, Dan was old enough to drive and she gave us her car. Dan had finished his *Berzerk* clone at that point and he took a copy. Sirius had a booth and we were in awe of their games. So Dan says he has a game and Jerry Jewell says can we see it, Dan runs the it, they love it and print out a contract to hire him right there and then!"

Dan moved to Sacramento to work for Sirius, where his *Berzerk* clone became *Borg*, but the boys stayed in touch and would eventually end up working together once more as Andrew explains. "I went out to visit him for the summer and he had a game idea he didn't have time to write, so he said 'why don't you do it'? He had some basic ideas that it would be a side scroller like *Defender* with above ground and below ground phases and we felt like we needed to go all out with number of types of enemies and complexity of their behaviour. I think I spent about two months living with Dan, then I had to go back to school and I worked on the game from when I came home untill about 3am and then went to school at 7am! We finished the game after maybe six months on the Apple II. It turned into a pretty big seller so Dan did the conversions to C-64 and Atari 8-bit. The games sold amazingly well and the royalty checks seemed huge to a 17-year-old."

Around this time, text and graphic adventures were becoming very popular and Apple II stalwarts Sierra On-Line were making a lot of money in this category, so it was suggested to Jerry that Sirius enter this market too, but it was short-lived as Jerry briefly explains: "There's not much to tell unfortunately. Tim Wilson wanted to do it so we did. It wasn't very successful for us so we went back to what we did best, arcade style games." But despite this setback a new opportunity opened up for Sirius, they had been approached to provide the titles for 20th Century Fox's new videogames venture. This would see games based on their most popular Hollywood moves as well as original content too. This deal saw them develop games like *The Earth Dies Screaming*, *Fantastic Voyage*, *Turmoil*, *Fast Eddie* and *Flash Gordon*. This successful partnership quickly turned sour with the advent of the great North American videogames crash. The collapse of the American market saw Fox put their videogames subsidiary into receivership, something that still leaves a very bitter taste in Jerry's mouth, "At last estimate [Fox Video Games] owed us no less than 14 MILLION dollars, which we were unable to collect when they shut down the company and filed for



Timeline

1980 SIRIUS SOFTWARE IS FOUNDED BY JERRY JEWELL AND NASIR GEBELLI.

1981 THEIR FIRST VIDEOGAME HITS THE MARKET, *BOTH BARRELS*, FOR THE APPLE II COMPUTER.

1982 *GORGON* IS RELEASED, A *DEFENDER* CLONE THAT BECOMES THE BEST SELLING HOME COMPUTER GAME IN HISTORY AT THAT TIME.

1983 SIRIUS CREATES ITS VERY FIRST GAMES BASED ON HOLLYWOOD MOVIES FOR 20TH CENTURY FOX.

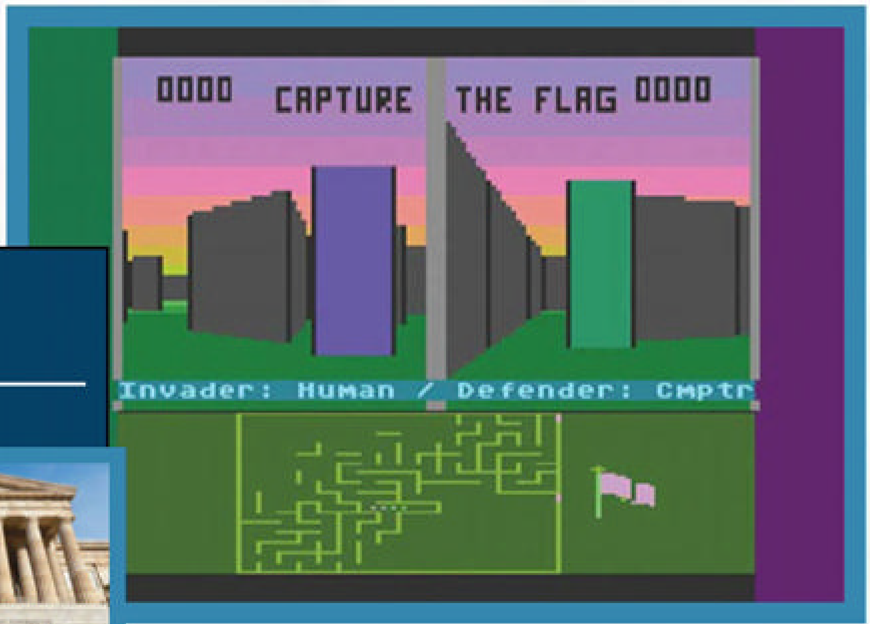
1984 THE COMPANY IS PUT INTO RECEIVERSHIP DUE TO UNPAID ROYALTIES OWED TO THEM BY FOX.

1987 THE SMITHSONIAN MUSEUM IN AMERICA PRODUCE A LIVING HISTORY OF SIRIUS SOFTWARE'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE VIDEOGAMES INDUSTRY.



» [Atari 8-bit] Chuck Sommerville's *Snake Byte* was a nice update on the popular *Snake* game, best remembered by early Nokia phone owners, it also has a nice title screen!





» [Atari 8-bit] *Capture The Flag* was the sequel to *Way Out* and features impressive 3D graphics.

The DNA of Sirius Software

Record Breakers

Sirius set new records for the number of games it produced in a year, broke sales records for several of its games and became the very first software company to pay a programmer royalties. These achievements saw Sirius recognised by several gaming publications as well as being celebrated by the Smithsonian Museum.



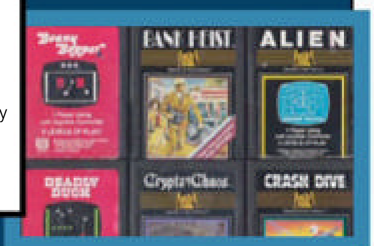
Superstar Programmers

Jerry Jewell hired some of the best young programmers in America to work for Sirius Software. People who would later go on to success with companies like Midway, Cinemaware and Epyx creating titles such as *Rocket Ranger, Chip's Challenge, Frogger 2, Star Control* and even the recent *Call Of Duty* games!



Genre Variations

Sirius Software diversity by producing games covering just about every genre under the sun. There were shoot 'em ups like *Repton* and *Turmoil*, platformers including *Fast Eddie*, strategy games such as *Call To Arms* and *Dark Forest*, racing games like *Autobahn* as well as some early attempts at 3D like *Capture The Flag*.



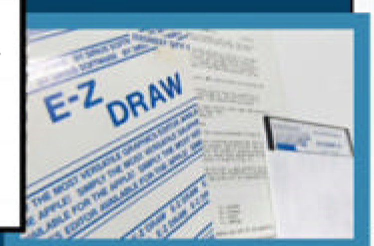
Film Stars

In the early Eighties games based on movies were still a very new thing. Most of the ones out there were unofficial efforts inspired by, but not named after, the films in question. Sirius were one of the first companies to produce games officially licensed on hit movies through its relationship with 20th Century Fox's videogames division.



Not Just Games

Videogames were not the only avenue of success for Sirius. Its first ever software release, EZ Draw, was an art program that also provided one of the first desktop publishing packages for a home computer. Sirius also produced educational titles such as *Type Attack*, which proved to be a valuable tool in helping children learn to type.

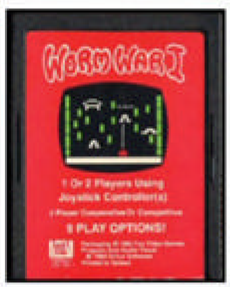


bankruptcy. That level of loss was the death knell for us. When they didn't pay the Bank Of America revoked our line of credit and seized all of our receivables." Jerry much blames himself for this though. "We should have never borrowed money against our annual revenue when we didn't need it. But my business inexperience and greed led us into deals with Fox and large retailers that we couldn't handle. When the market collapsed we were in no position to sustain the losses. It was game over."

The staff at Sirius remember these sad days too, David Lubar offered up this succinct statement: "I'm sorry they went out of business, but it just seemed inevitable, given the way they handled the finances." Andrew was still young and it all caught him a bit by

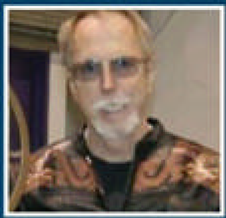
> **"Dan (Thompson) says he has a game and Jerry Jewell says can we see it, Dan runs the thing, they love it and print out a contract to hire him right there and then!"** ANDREW KALUZNIACKI

surprise, "As a 17-year-old contractor living far away I was not privy to the details, all I knew was that they were telling me I had no royalties. I'd become kind of used to that monthly cheque, even if they had come to be smaller than the first, it was still a big deal. I'd moved out of my mum's house and was supporting myself. But what can you do? So I talked to Dan and he said he was looking for a new place to work. I decided that I'd go to college. But, as it turned out I went to work for Infocom for a year between high school and college. Long term the Infocom gig had more effect on my life, but I'd not have gotten the chance at Infocom without the work at Sirius." Chuck offered up some great insight into the final days at the company: "In one sense, I was relieved that it was a mass layoff. I could proudly say that I was let go the same day the president was let go. I was paid a percentage of what was owed on my royalties and I understood that under the circumstances it was the best I was going to get, so time to move on." But this would not be Chuck's final fling with Jerry Jewell as



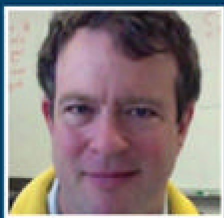
» Early Sirius games published by 20th Century Fox for the Atari 2600 feature vivid red labels.

Where Are They Now?



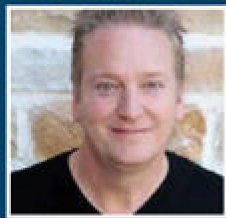
Jerry Jewell

Shortly after Sirius Software folded Jerry went to work as a consultant for Epyx. After that finished he also specialised in Apple products and training for a while. He now runs a company building animatronic skulls for the Halloween industry. It's not been easy for Jerry though as he was diagnosed with Lupus in 2004, a brain tumour in 2011 and heart problems followed, leading him to radio therapy and having a pacemaker fitted. However, he says he now feels better than ever.



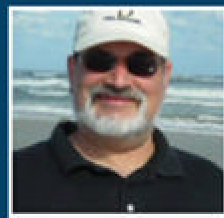
Andrew Kaluzniacki

Andrew currently works for Systems & Technology Research where he does systems architecture, software design and implementation. He also spent around eight years working in various software based roles at BAE Systems and a number of other software engineering roles for private companies. In his time after Sirius he worked for both Infocom and PF Magic helping create games such as *PaTaank*, *Beyond Zork* and *Max Magic*.



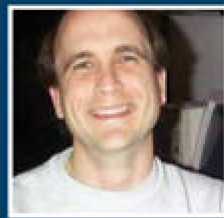
Mark Turmell

Mark has an incredible history in the games industry, having worked on plenty of popular games. After his days at Sirius he went on to work as a programmer for several famous videogame companies, including Electronic Arts and Activision before settling in his current role at Zynga as their Senior Creative Director. But Mark most famously spent seven years at Midway where he worked on games such as *Smash TV*, *NBA Jam* and the *Mortal Kombat* series.



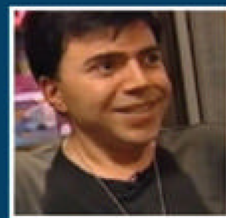
David Lubar

David has a long, successful and storied history in the video games industry but now spends his time writing children's books such as the popular *Weenies* series. In his career he has programmed and contributed to over forty different games having worked for companies such as Activision, Parker Brothers, Atari, Broderbund and Absolute Entertainment. He also does educational visits to schools to talk about writing both books and videogames.



Chuck Sommerville

As well as developing various Android games, like the recently released *Chuck's Challenge*, Chuck works for a company writing firmware for custom lighting projects. After the demise of Sirius he headed to Epyx where he worked on titles such as *Summer Games*. After Epyx he spent two years as a Senior Software Engineer at Electronic Arts before rejoining many of his former Epyx colleagues at 3DO writing 3D graphics rendering software for the platform.



Nasir Gebelli

After Nasir Gebelli co-founded Sirius Software he created his own company Gebelli Software, but was unsuccessful with this venture. After a long vacation where he travelled the world he returned to the games industry in 1986 and took a job with Square Enix where he produced the early *Final Fantasy* games with Hironobu Sakaguchi. He also developed *3D WorldRunner*, *Secret Of Mana* and *Rad Racer*

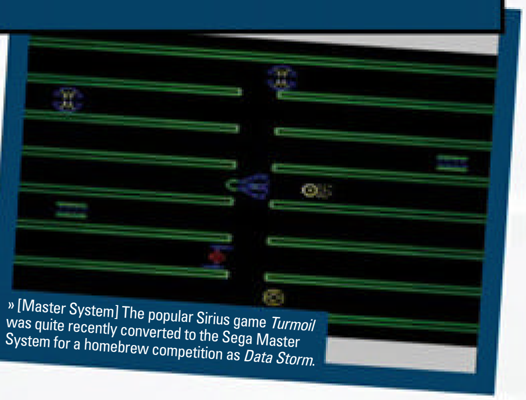
The Fox In The Box

The key moment in Sirius Software's history was the multi-million dollar deal it had with 20th Century Fox to produce Atari 2600 games for Fox's videogames division. This led to Sirius producing games based on hit movies such as *Flash Gordon*, *The Earth Dies Screaming*, *Fantastic Voyage*, *9 To 5* and *M*A*S*H*. It also developed a number of original games too that it had self published on other systems, which included many of the label's earlier games such as *Fast Eddie*, *Beany Bopper* and *Deadly Duck*.

This relationship turned sour when Fox put its videogames division into receivership, allegedly owing Sirius over $14 million in royalties as well as payments for a number of games that were never released. Sirius also produced a number of games for SpectraVideo, well-known manufacturer of the Quickshot Joysticks, such as *Challenge Of Nexar*, *Bumper Bash* and *Gas Hog*.

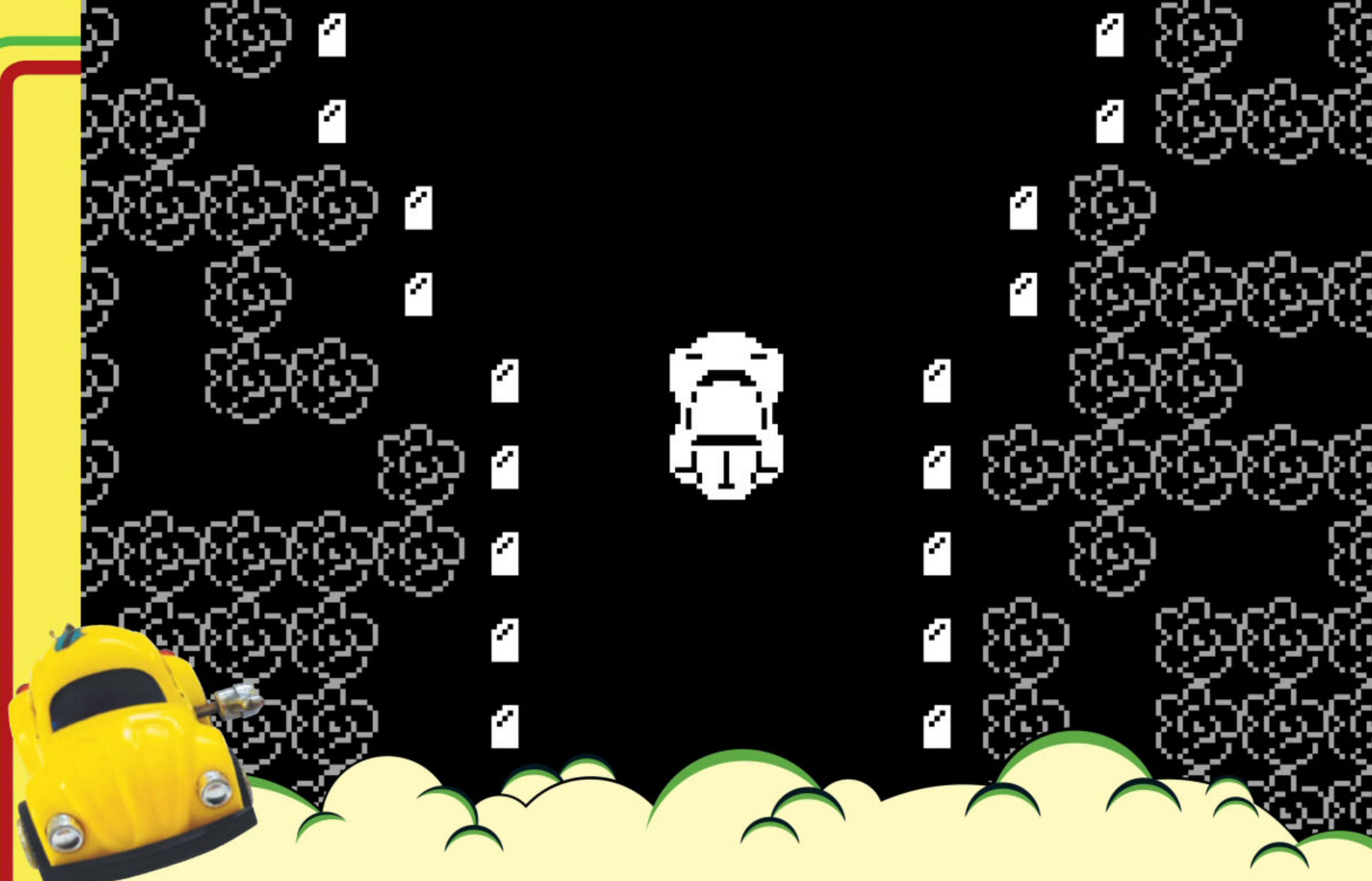


he went on to explain to us. "Luckily for me, there was a little left that would transition into my next job that kept me in the games industry. My manager was taking a job writing for software publishing newspapers and I followed him there. It was a really boring job and after about two weeks, I got a call from Jerry who said he was taking a position as a project manager at Epyx and wanted me to write games for him again. I took the job and ported Summer Games to the Apple II. At the end of that project Jerry decided to do another start-up as a software studio called Soft Pros, so I followed him again. That business didn't go anywhere, so I returned to Epyx."



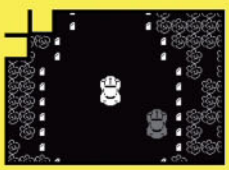
» [Master System] The popular Sirius game *Turmoil* was quite recently converted to the Sega Master System for a homebrew competition as *Data Storm*.

It would be wrong to leave this story on such a sour note so we gave the Sirius guys some time to focus on their happier days and David offered up this gem: "I remember the day Mark Turmell bought his Porsche. We went for a ride right after he took it from the lot, and were cruising one of the local areas. I think it might have been Bird Cage Walk, a mall near where we lived and a young lady looked at it as we pulled up to a stop sign, then said to Mark, 'Daddy's car?' it was hilarious!" Chuck was next to pipe up. "For some reason, I didn't mix all that well with the other programmers. They were all friends and I guess didn't know what to make of me. I got along better with the production staff. There was some fun there though. I remember on Fridays, there would be a shrink wrap ball fight where people would make balls out of wrap and chase each other around the shop throwing them at each other!" From those happy stories we want to give the final words to founder Jerry Jewell, who feels he very much still has some old wounds to heal. "When we entered bankruptcy we hired a lawyer named Robert Mees. We were required to give him power of attorney over our assets. As the proceedings dragged on we wanted to hurry up and get back to business. But he told us one story after another and dragged it out. In the meantime our programmers wanted to be kept up to date so we'd pass on the information Mees gave us. Eventually it all collapsed in an ugly mess. Mees had absconded with the money – hundreds of thousands of dollars. He was caught a while later in a similar theft and ended up serving prison time. But in the meantime many friends were lost because they all thought Terry and I had been lying to them. Most of those relationships are still not resolved, which is very sad. I do hope this short, sad story will start a bit of healing amongst those that were hurt by the whole Sirius Software collapse." ✱



SUPER BUG

Back in the Seventies, a new breed of racing games was driven into arcades by Howard Delman. Paul Drury falls in love with his Super Bug



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** KEE GAMES
- » **DEVELOPER:** HOWARD DELMAN
- » **RELEASED:** 1977
- » **PLATFORM:** ARCADE
- » **GENRE:** RACING



You know when you've been bitten by the gaming bug and for Howard Delman, it was during the long hot summer of 1976. "It was my first game so everything was new and it was a blast," he enthuses. "I joined Atari right out of school and I did not really know anything about making games, so for the first two or three months I watched other engineers, looked at their work, helped out here and there, tried to act smart… but *Super Bug* was the first thing that was really mine."

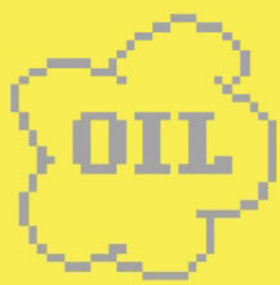
It was an interesting time for Howard to join the arcade pioneers. Atari was enjoying great success with the block-smashing hit, *Breakout*, but whereas that game was produced solely using hardware, the company was now moving into creating games with software, meaning its new batch of employees would need to be more adept at soldering and programming. "It allowed us to do a lot more," he smiles, "but now you had to not only design the hardware, you had to code the software too!"

So a young Howard was called into the office of his boss, Lyle Rains, who outlined the concept for *City Driver*. The game would have a top down view of city streets, with crossroads and other vehicles, and crucially would feature a playfield that would scroll in four directions. He then handed Howard the piece of hardware which would allow this breakthrough in gameplay. "I took all this junk back to my desk and went: 'Holy shit, how am I going to do this!'" he chuckles, "but then I took what was essentially a black box diagram given to me by Lyle and started to implement the design."

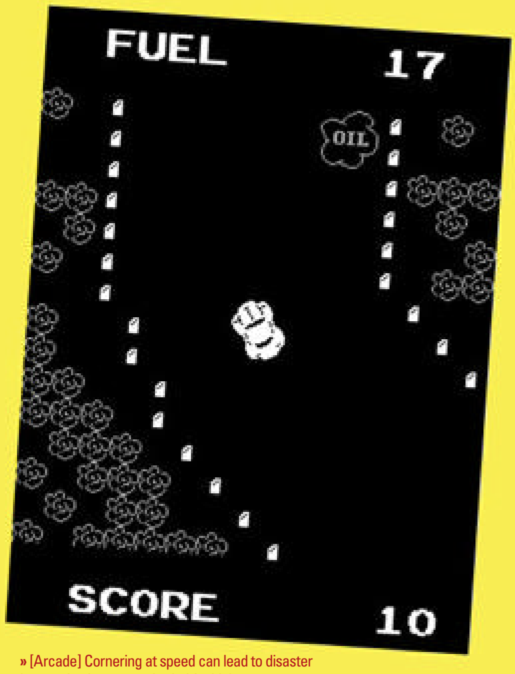
Howard began his experiments in the brave new world of scrolling racers, ably assisted by his technician Mary Pepper, periodically showing his progress to Lyle, who would give feedback and suggestions. They soon realised the urban setting was a little too ambitious and so headed out into the country, creating curvaceous tree-lined roads for gamers to speed along. Well, we think they're trees, though they could be giant lettuces.



» [Arcade] Crashing into an inconveniently parked car results in a screen flash and cartoon 'crunch'.







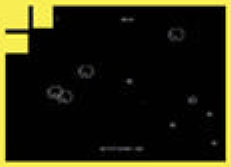
» [Arcade] Cornering at speed can lead to disaster but staying in top gear is vital for high scores.

"Hey, Lyle did the graphics and don't be too hard on him," protests Howard. "We didn't have a lot to work with! Actually, the 'Crunch!' that appears when you crash was done by my ex-wife.."

How apt, we suggest. We are indeed being unfair as for such an early black and white game, the visuals have real character, particularly the *Batman*-style exclamation that accompanies any collisions with the trackside or parked cars. The car graphic is unmistakably a Volkswagen Beetle, too, which prompted the name change to *Super Bug*, a shrewd move given the return of *Herbie* to cinema screens just before the game's release.

Steering your iconic motor along the winding track is made more challenging due to annoying patches of oil and sand littering your route and the strict time limit (cleverly represented by an ever-decreasing fuel supply) means it is vital to quickly shift through your four gears to reach top speed. Chicanes, branching routes and tight corners all add up to one wild ride, made more thrilling by the screeching sound effects.

"I created all the sounds," says Howard, proudly. "They were done in hardware, with software turning them on and off. The engine sound, the crash, the skid… each one had its own little piece of hardware. To be fair, I could take sounds used in other games and change them a bit if I wanted to but I didn't really want my game to sound exactly like *Sprint 2*!"



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

CANYON BOMBER
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1978

LUNAR LANDER
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1979

ASTEROIDS (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1979

Released into arcades in the Autumn of 1977, *Super Bug* certainly built on previous Atari titles, or to be more specific, games released through their wholly-owned subsidiary, Kee Games. *Indy 800* and the *Sprint* series pioneered top-down racing but it was *Super Bug* that introduced the revolutionary aspect of multi-directional scrolling. We still remember marvelling at this new feature, imagining the road we were careering along snaking out from the back of the cabinet all over the walls of our local arcade. Did Howard realise that he was kick-starting a whole new gameplay element?

"Not at the time," he replies, modestly. "I was given the concept and had to implement it. I had to make it real and make it work… and at the start it didn't! Stuff jumped all over the place. Bugs in the hardware, bugs in my software… but when I finally went to see it out on field test, boy was I proud. Oh my God, I designed a game!"

Howard recalls the game selling around 3000 units, a respectable number for the time, and it did well enough to inspire him to produce two sequels of sorts. "Once *Super Bug* had shipped, the question was raised, can we have two cars?" he explains.

"Well, no, you can't really because the car doesn't move – it stays at the centre of the screen. So we brainstormed how we could make it into two player game and came up with the idea of a fire truck. One guy in the front, the other in the back!"

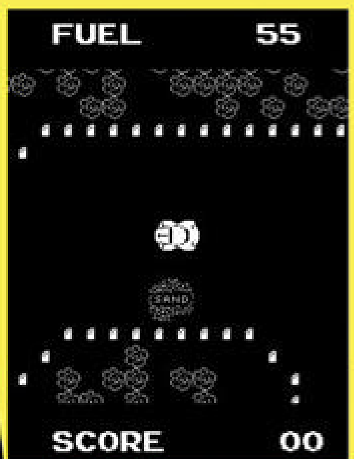
Built using the *Super Bug* hardware and software, the hulking *Fire Truck* was released in 1978 and qualifies as the first simultaneous co-op game, with one player driving the rig and the other desperately trying to steer the trailer. A single player version, *Smokey Joe*, appeared the same year but the real legacy of *Super Bug* is the slew of top-down scrolling racing games that followed over the next three decades. We ask Howard if he's ever played *Micro Machines*, but he shakes his head, so we start hailing him as the granddaddy of a whole videogame genre.

"Hey, please don't put the word granddaddy in front of me," he laughs. "Father I'll take!"

Howard 'The Daddy' Delman it is, then.

Many thanks to Martyn Carroll for additional help

> **"Super Bug was the first thing that was really mine."**
> Howard's recalls his debut release fondly



» [Arcade] Oil and sand have been carelessly scattered across the track, causing some impressive skidding at speed.





» *Super Bug* is best played on an original cabinet – you'll find this one in ACAM at Funspot in New Hampshire, USA



» Here's one of the cool wind-up cars used to promote the game.

HOWIE GOES BANANAS

How Super Bug cashed in on the popularity of the Volkswagon Beetle

Though Howard suggests the name change from *City Driver* to *Super Bug* was in response to Lyle Rains' car graphic resembling a Volkswagen, the game certainly rode a wave of Beetle-mania that year. *Herbie Goes To Monte Carlo*, also released in 1977, was the third film starring the amorous and independently-minded motor and it appears Atari were keen to capitalise on the popularity of the 'Love Bug' to promote its new game. "When the game was first shown at an AMOA show, we actually gave out little wind-up Volkswagen cars," remembers Howard, "and I still have one! It's boxed up in my storage space but I kept it." *Super Bug* wasn't the only game to feature the famous car – the mighty *Jump Bug*, released in 1981, had a Volkswagen Beetle as its main sprite and it could well be the first scrolling platformer thanks to its pyramid stage.

TOP 25 ZX81 GAMES

As the machine that introduced affordable computing to the British public, the ZX81 holds a special place in many gamers' memories. Nick Thorpe counts down the best games on Sir Clive Sinclair's groundbreaking machine – did your favourite make the cut?



City Patrol

■ **DEVELOPER:** Don Priestly
■ **YEAR:** 1982 ■ **GENRE:** Shoot-'em-up

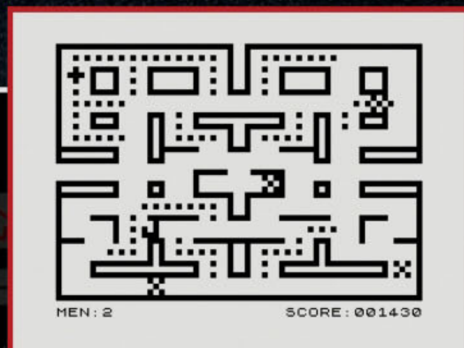
25 When you're thinking of visually impressive ZX81 games, *City Patrol* is a name that needs to be near the top of the list. The game's scrolling cityscape not only makes excellent use of the computer's character graphics, but delivers multiple layers of parallax to show the depth of the city you're fighting to protect. This greatly enhances suspension of disbelief as you try to avoid levelling any skyscrapers while you duel with your alien foe.

ZX Galaxians

■ **DEVELOPER:** Artic ■ **YEAR:** 1982 ■ **GENRE:** Shoot-'em-up

24 The ZX81's unofficial conversion of Namco's arcade hit is not quite the most authentic out there, but it certainly offers some frenetic shooting that doesn't let up for even a second. Unlike the arcade game on which it is based, *ZX Galaxians* features random attack patterns for its enemies, ensuring that players are kept on their toes while dealing with the alien menace. The side-bar featuring play instructions as well as score, high score and lives displays is a nice presentational touch, too.

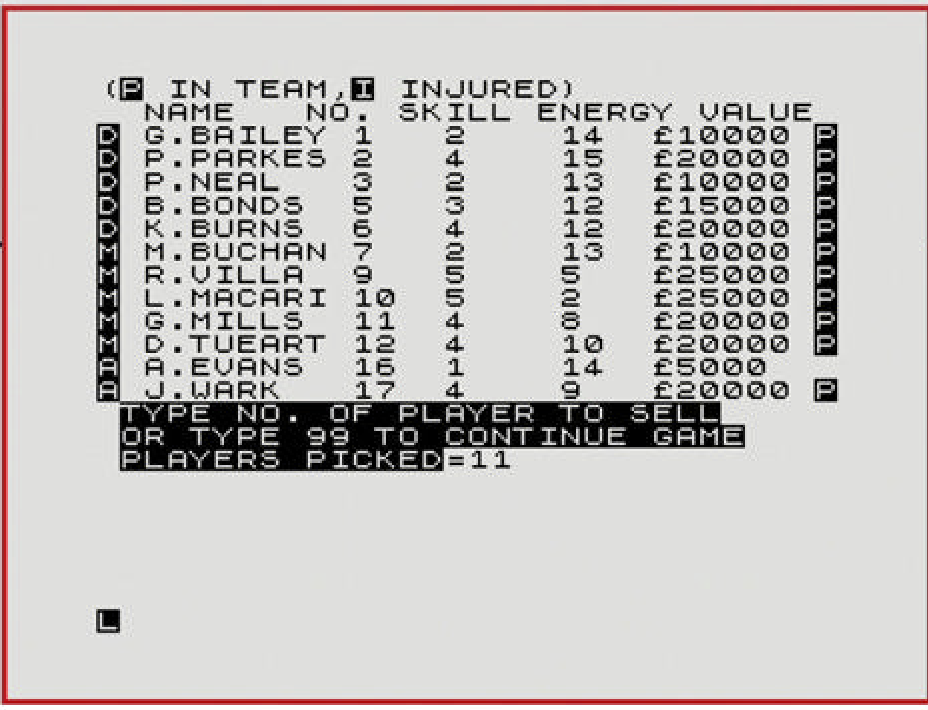




Damper/ Glooper

■ **DEVELOPER:** MP Crane ■ **YEAR:** 1983 ■ **GENRE:** Maze

23 Quicksilva's excellent double pack featured two unofficial conversions of arcade maze game hits *Amidar* (*Damper*) and *Pac-Man* (*Glooper*). Both games feature highly responsive controls and are rather faithful to the arcade originals – in particular, *Glooper* replicates the arcade maze layout of *Pac-Man* perfectly, which was not a common achievement in the early Eighties.



Football Manager

■ **DEVELOPER:** KEVIN TOMS ■ **YEAR:** 1982 ■ **GENRE:** SPORTS

22 The ZX81 was a humble machine even in its day, and its limitations posed some real challenges to developers. For example, how would you represent a football match on the machine? It would struggle to differentiate teams thanks to its visual quirks, and shifting the multitude of moving objects inherent to football was not one of the machine's strengths. Kevin Toms' vision neatly sidestepped these issues by shifting the player's control. Instead of taking control of a player, as in previous sports games, *Football Manager* allows you to fill the role of the man in the dugout.

While the game's limits can be found quite early on, the gameplay present is certainly compelling. As manager, you're able to take control of one of 32 league teams and select your squad, hire and fire players, balance the budget, and manage injuries. Your team is rated on various criteria and your performance as a manager is also under scrutiny. The text-based interface is very functional and keeps the game moving along briskly.

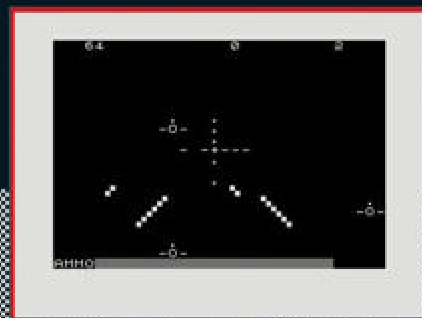
All of this would be for naught if the matches lacked the tension and drama of real football, but the live text readout replicates this perfectly – with each new line promising a goal, you'll constantly be hoping that the final one reads in your favour, but you can never know for sure. It's for that reason that the Addictive Games moniker was appropriate – *Football Manager* is not only a truly innovative piece of software, but one which uses time-tested techniques to hook players just as effectively as any of the many games which followed in its footsteps.

Night Gunner

■ **DEVELOPER:** Digital Integration

■ **YEAR:** 1982 ■ **GENRE:** Shoot-'em-up

21 As the rear gunner in a bomber under attack, it's your job to take out enemy planes in order to stay alive. This means moving your crosshair from a first person perspective to shoot down the endless stream of bogeys as quickly as possible, with points available for quicker hits. While the game's visuals are sparse, it's clear to see that the developer had the capabilities of the ZX81 in mind both when creating them and the setting that justifies them. It's a very good piece of software, and one which we suspect would have gone rather higher on the list had it not been for the similar first-person shooting game in the top ten…



Avenger

■ **DEVELOPER:** Kevin Flynn

■ **YEAR:** 1982 ■ **GENRE:** Shoot-'em-up

20 *Scramble* was certainly a popular game to clone in the early Eighties, and *Avenger* is definitely one of the ZX81's better efforts. The key to this is in its additions to the original formula. *Avenger* offers the usual laser fire and bombs that are common to *Scramble* and its other variants, but adds an additional wrinkle in that your laser can overheat with prolonged use and become unusable. Additionally, atomic power stations are found on the surface of the planet. While most buildings are there to be blown up, these are to be avoided as they'll blow up the planet in a giant mushroom cloud. While there are prettier clones of *Scramble* on the ZX81, few of them require the restraint and thought that *Avenger* demands of its players.



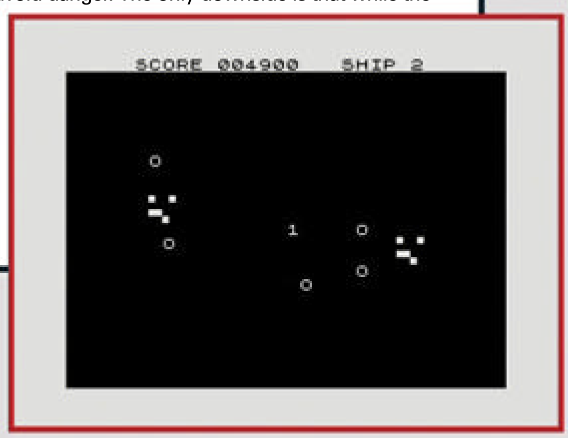




QS Asteroids

■ **DEVELOPER:** Quicksilva ■ **YEAR:** 1982 ■ **GENRE:** Shoot-'em-up

19 This unofficial ZX81 conversion of Atari's hit really ticks all the right boxes, and works particularly well on the format due to the monochrome visuals of the original. While you don't have the same degree of control as in the arcade game – you're limited to eight directions, rather than 360 degree movement – the game is a faithful version. Asteroids split as you'd expect and movement is swift enough to allow you to avoid danger. The only downside is that while the game looks excellent if you're using the QS Character Board add-on, players that don't have it are faced with a rough-looking game in which you pilot numbers, rather than an actual spaceship.







Fungaloids

■ **DEVELOPER:** Michael Orwin
■ **YEAR:** 1982 ■ **GENRE:** Shoot-'em-up

18 Arriving on Michael Orwin's compilation tape *Cassette Four* alongside clones of games such as *Space Invaders* and *Scramble*, *Fungaloids* overshadows the other games in the package due to its high quality and its surprising originality. The basic goal of the game is to manoeuvre your flyer over the tops of the ever-growing fungaloids, bombing them into the ground. However, they can retaliate by firing dangerous spores, which not only damage your craft but block bombs too.

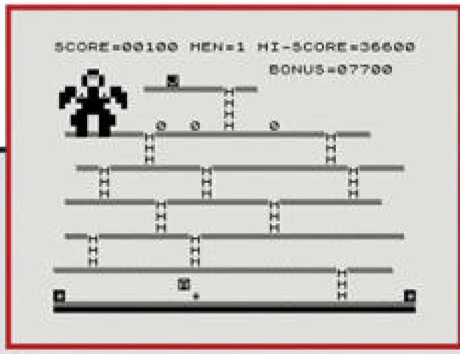
As well as having to manage the fungaloids themselves, you will need to keep a close eye on your flyer's supplies, as it can only carry a limited amount of fuel and ammunition. As a result, balancing regular resupply runs with fungaloid management is the key to success in this game. It's not a pretty ZX81 game by all accounts, but it's one of the most original arcade-style games to appear on the platform.

Krazy Kong

■ **DEVELOPER:** CP CULLEN
■ **YEAR:** 1982 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORM

17 Between the limited American impact of the ZX81 and the US-centric licensing of arcade games in the early Eighties, Sinclair's machine received few official versions of major arcade hits like *Donkey Kong*. Luckily for owners of the computer, enterprising coders were up to the task of creating unofficial clones – and in the case of games like *Krazy Kong*, they could be rather faithful.

Krazy Kong features all the barrel-jumping and fireball-dodging of the arcade game on which it was based, with a few notable concessions, including straight floors and no hammers with which to turn the tables. However, after that first stage things begin to deviate with some more original level design concepts that distinguished the game from its inspiration. While it would win no awards for overall originality, *Krazy Kong* perfectly satisfied the desire for an action platformer amongst ZX81 owners.



Froggy

■ **DEVELOPER:** David and John Looker ■ **YEAR:** 1982 ■ **GENRE:** Action

16 Here's a case study in the benefits of working to a platform's strengths. Two ZX81 games were released under the name of *Frogger* – DJL Software's unofficial version, which was later retitled *Froggy* and is the game that makes this list, and the Cornsoft version which carries an official licence from Sega and was released via Timex in North America. The latter version was largely concerned with retaining visual fidelity, and broke the game screen into two distinct sections in order to draw detailed sprites. Unfortunately, this flick-screen approach never felt quite right as the playfield felt too rather too narrow.

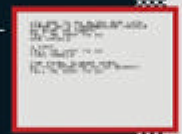
The DJL Software version recognises that the ZX81 isn't best suited to an accurate recreation of the arcade game's visuals, and instead concentrates on preserving the overall game design, retaining the single-screen format of the arcade game and the full five berths for safe frogs. As such, while it looks very much like that you are playing as an asterisk, the sense that you are actually playing *Frogger* is much greater. It just goes to show that an official licence does not strictly guarantee a superior product.





The Ship Of Doom

■ **DEVELOPER:** Artic ■ **YEAR:** 1982
■ **GENRE:** Adventure



15 The ZX81 was well equipped to handle text adventures, and *The Ship Of Doom* was a classic. Your goal is to free yourself from the alien cruiser which has captured you, lest you become a slave and have your brain replaced with a microchip.

Trader

■ **DEVELOPER:** Pixel ■ **YEAR:** 1982
■ **GENRE:** Adventure



14 This mammoth space trading adventure offered players the chance to deal in fuel, food, building materials and even narcotics across the moons of Meridien. Even with the 16K RAM pack attached, the game was so large that it had to be loaded in three parts.

QS Invaders

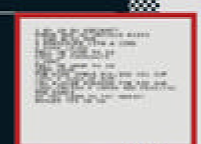
■ **DEVELOPER:** Quicksilva ■ **YEAR:** 1982
■ **GENRE:** Shoot-'em-up



13 Another of Quicksilva's high quality unofficial arcade conversions, this one being of Taito's hit *Space Invaders*. The game features enhanced graphics for the invaders and the player cannon when used with the QS Character Board, but plays perfectly well without it.

Espionage Island

■ **DEVELOPER:** Artic ■ **YEAR:** 1982
■ **GENRE:** Adventure



12 Players were able to test their mettle with this text adventure, which saw the player searching for a secret on an island. The length of the adventure required the ability to save the game, in order for players to take breaks.

Black Crystal

■ **DEVELOPER:** Carnell Software
■ **YEAR:** 1982 ■ **GENRE:** RPG



11 Set out on a quest to destroy the titular gem, while picking up keys and confronting dragons across six maps. This RPG provided many players with their first experience of the genre, and is enthralling despite being a tough cookie.



1K ZX Chess

■ **DEVELOPER:** David Horne ■ **YEAR:** 1983 ■ **GENRE:** Strategy

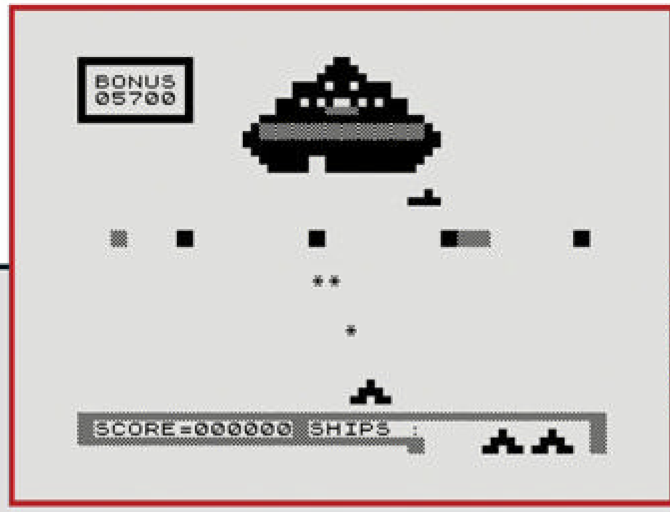
10 The unexpanded ZX81 is an incredibly difficult machine to write games for due to its severely limited memory, but David Horne managed to pull off the seemingly impossible with *1K ZX Chess*. The game offers not only a relatively complete game of chess (excluding castling, pawn promotion and en passant captures) but also an AI opponent and automatic rules checking. The implementation of chess is incredibly sound for such a small program, and amazingly the computer opponent plays a reasonable game. It might not be much to look at, with pieces represented by letters alone, but *1K ZX Chess* is an extraordinary technical achievement and a truly enjoyable game. It might well be the very best thing that can be done on a ZX81 without a RAM pack.

Invasion Force

■ **DEVELOPER:** Simon Wadsworth ■ **YEAR:** 1982 ■ **GENRE:** Shoot-'em-up

9 While at first glance *Invasion Force* resembles the arcade classic *Phoenix*, in no small part thanks to the big mothership hovering at the top of the screen, it's a rather different proposition. Two enemies and a forcefield attempt to prevent the destruction of the boss enemy, and while damage to the forcefield is permanent you can only temporarily dispatch the smaller enemies.

Once the defences have been penetrated, the mothership itself can be attacked, but the solid black parts of the forcefield are indestructible and will repair the mothership when hit. You will need to be sparing with your shots as a result, with a rhythmic firing pattern yielding far greater results than mindless blasting. The quicker you can take down the boss, the more bonus points you'll earn. While *Invasion Force* isn't the prettiest of ZX81 games, it makes up for it with considered, compelling, and overall fun shoot-'em-up design.





QS Scramble

■ **DEVELOPER:** Quicksilva
■ **YEAR:** 1982 ■ **GENRE:** Shoot-'em-up

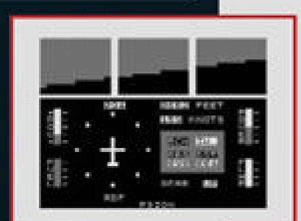
8 Quicksilva did some good business on the ZX81 with its unofficial arcade conversions, and *QS Scramble* is the one that keeps us coming back. The shooting and bombing in Konami's original arcade game was always compelling, and Quicksilva captured it with authenticity on the ZX81 by providing responsive controls and well-matched gameplay.

Much like *QS Asteroids* and *QS Invaders*, *QS Scramble* supported Quicksilva's custom add-on boards to push the limitations of the machine, with the character board providing enhanced visuals and support for the sound board. They weren't cheap, as by the time you'd bought both plus the required motherboard you'd have spent enough to buy another ZX81, but the results were convincing. However, the game ran fine without the add-ons.

Flight Simulator

■ **DEVELOPER:** Psion ■ **YEAR:** 1982 ■ **GENRE:** Simulator

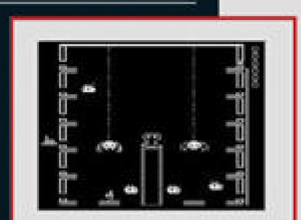
7 A formative experience for many ZX81 owners due to its wide availability, *Flight Simulator* presents a remarkably complete flying experience. The screen consists of a variety of instruments which display your plane's status, as well as a view of the horizon. You are able to control most aspects of flight beyond the direction, but keep in mind that incorrect usage will result in disaster, It's even possible to toggle the use of wind effects, to provide a more complete experience.



Booster

■ **DEVELOPER:** Software Farm ■ **YEAR:** 1985 ■ **GENRE:** Platform

6 The last of Software Farm's high-res games for the ZX81 was the follow-up to *Rocket Man* that many players wanted. Players were tasked with using their jetpack to ferry items across a screens filled with deadly enemies, drawn with detail thanks to the developer's high resolution routines. Sadly, players who were using the ZX81 by 1985 missed this rare mail order game, as Software Farm's distributor had collapsed and the rest of the distribution market was focusing on newer machines.

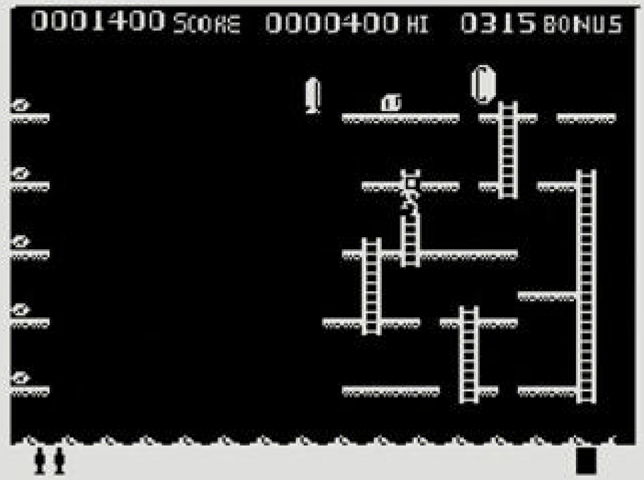


3D Defender

■ **DEVELOPER:** JK Greye
■ **YEAR:** 1981 ■ **GENRE:** Shoot-'em-up

5 It might be tricky to get the hang of this fast-paced blaster, but it's worth it. Placed in the cockpit of a spaceship defending Earth from an alien menace, your goal is to shoot down as many of the invaders as possible. While the absolutely enormous UFO enemies dominate the screen as they fly toward you, the real surprise is how swiftly they move and how smoothly animated the explosions are when contact is made. Thanks to mastery of ZX81 machine code, *3D Defender* become one of the standard bearers for graphics on the system, along with other early releases from JK Greye Software.





Rocket Man

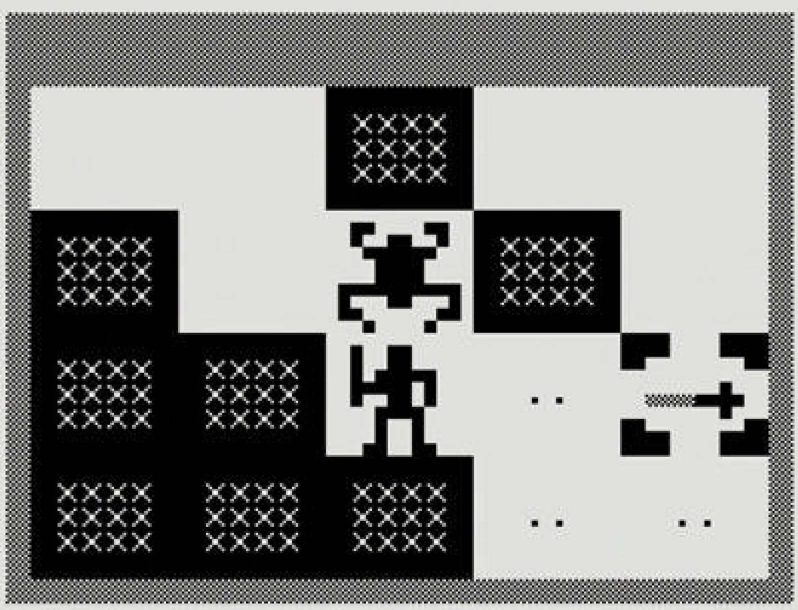
■ **DEVELOPER:** Software Farm ■ **YEAR:** 1984 ■ **GENRE:** Platform

4 Having firmly established its value as a ZX81 publisher by introducing its high-res range with *Forty Niner*, Software Farm's follow-up was highly anticipated and didn't disappoint, blending parts of *Donkey Kong* and *Jetpac* to create a rather unique game. *Rocket Man* is a single-screen platformer which requires you to gather fuel and a rocket pack in order to cross the water and collect diamonds, while avoiding a strange bubble that relentlessly pursues the player. It actually reminds us somewhat of the Rover from the mind-bending TV series *The Prisoner*.

Mazogs

■ **DEVELOPER:** Don Priestly ■ **YEAR:** 1982 ■ **GENRE:** Maze

3 With enormous sprites and amusing cartoon fights, *Mazogs* is a firm favourite of ours. The goal of navigating the maze amay seem simple, especially given the presence of prisoners that help you find your way, but it's complicated by the presence of the Mazogs themselves. Given that you only have a 50% chance of winning a fight with them unarmed, you'll need to find swords to take them out. But with the move limits present on higher difficulties, you'll need to know when to take a risk.

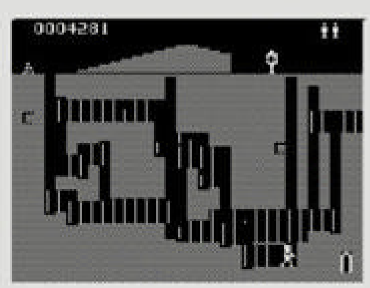


Forty Niner

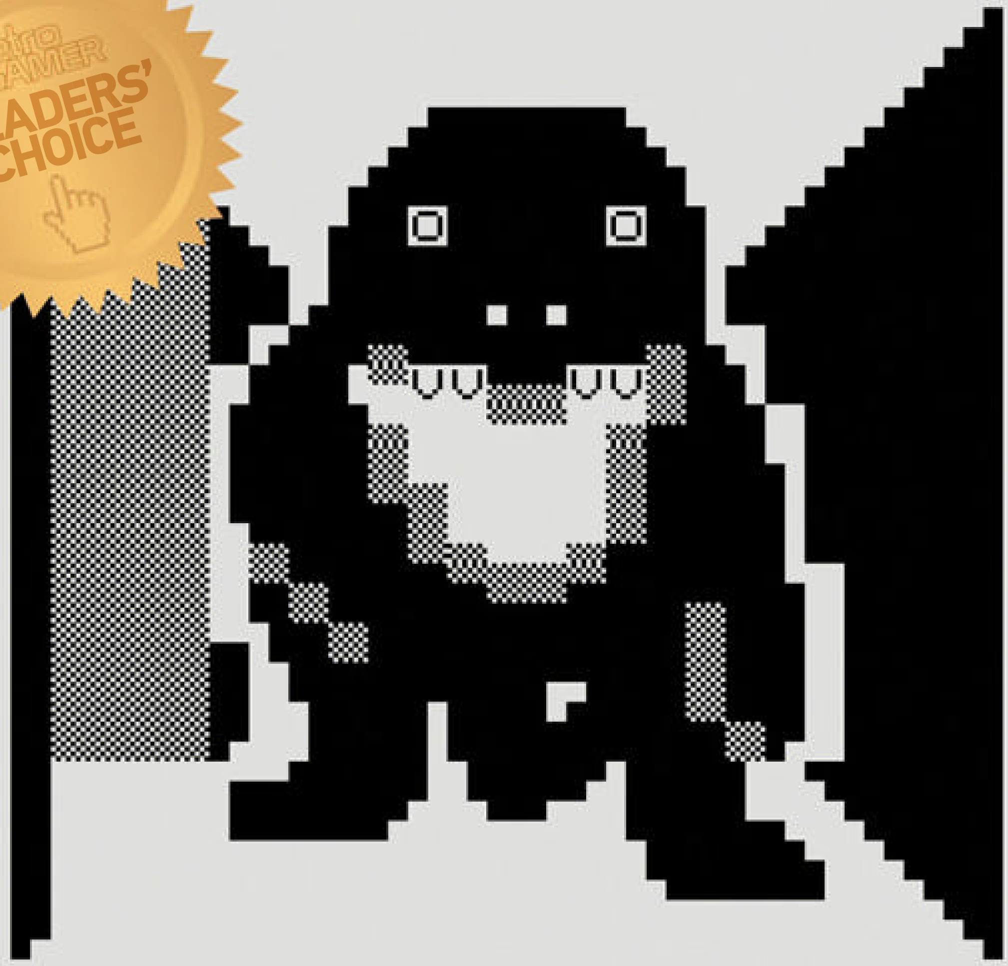
■ **DEVELOPER:** Software Farm
■ **YEAR:** 1983 ■ **GENRE:** RPG

2 Ushering in a graphical revolution for ZX81 games, *Forty Niner* used a rather clever programming trick to break the system's limitations. The result was that unlike previous games, which largely drew graphics in an extremely low resolution or with creative use of the ZX81's pre-defined characters, Software Farm was able to utilise custom visuals while maintaining a relatively high resolution output.

Forty Niner is mostly commonly remembered for this graphical achievement, but it also offered some fine arcade gameplay. Your goal is to mine for gold nuggets while avoiding giant rats, which can be killed by releasing the snakes which are found dotted around each stage. You only have a limited time to complete this task, however, thanks to the gremlin that eats through the mound of earth at the top of the stage before coming to find and eat you!



retro GAMER READERS' CHOICE



Five Reasons Why It's Great

1 **_3D Monster Maze_ has one of gaming's most enormous and memorable adversaries.**

2 **It does some really amazing things, despite running on very humble hardware.**

3 **Very few games can lay claim to such a proud design legacy.**

4 **Legitimate scares in games are few and far between, but _3D Monster Maze_ nailed it early.**

5 **The on-screen messages heighten the atmosphere considerably, and are now rather iconic. "Footsteps approaching" indeed…**

3D Monster Maze

DEVELOPER: Malcolm Evans **YEAR:** 1982 **GENRE:** Maze

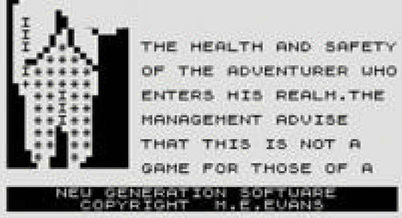
1 Sometimes these top 25 lists are wide open affairs, with a huge number of potential winners, but most are more predictable and offer only two or three possible winners. However, the real rarity is a platform on which one game overshadows everything else, and the ZX81 is just such a platform. It's an obvious name sitting atop our list, but there's a reason it's a predictable choice – *3D Monster Maze* deserves the accolade.

With so many maze games available in the early years of videogaming, *3D Monster Maze* needed very distinct selling points. The first of these is the game's effective method of building tension. While the presence of a single enemy might sound quaint given that you face four in *Pac-Man*, your restricted viewpoint gives you much less information to work with in avoiding it. All that you have to go on is the game's warning system, which provides you with ominous messages such as "Footsteps approaching" and "He is hunting for you" – ironically, these were intended to prevent any shock to the player.

The game's first-person 3D visuals didn't just enhance the gameplay by obfuscating the titular monster and dead ends – they were an important selling point. On a system which struggled to display complex images, *3D Monster Maze* exhibited impressive visuals of a kind rarely seen at the time on any platform. The biggest attraction was of course the Tyrannosaurus Rex itself, an enormous beast that occupied your entire view of the maze, shortly before you became a light afternoon snack for the prehistoric predator.

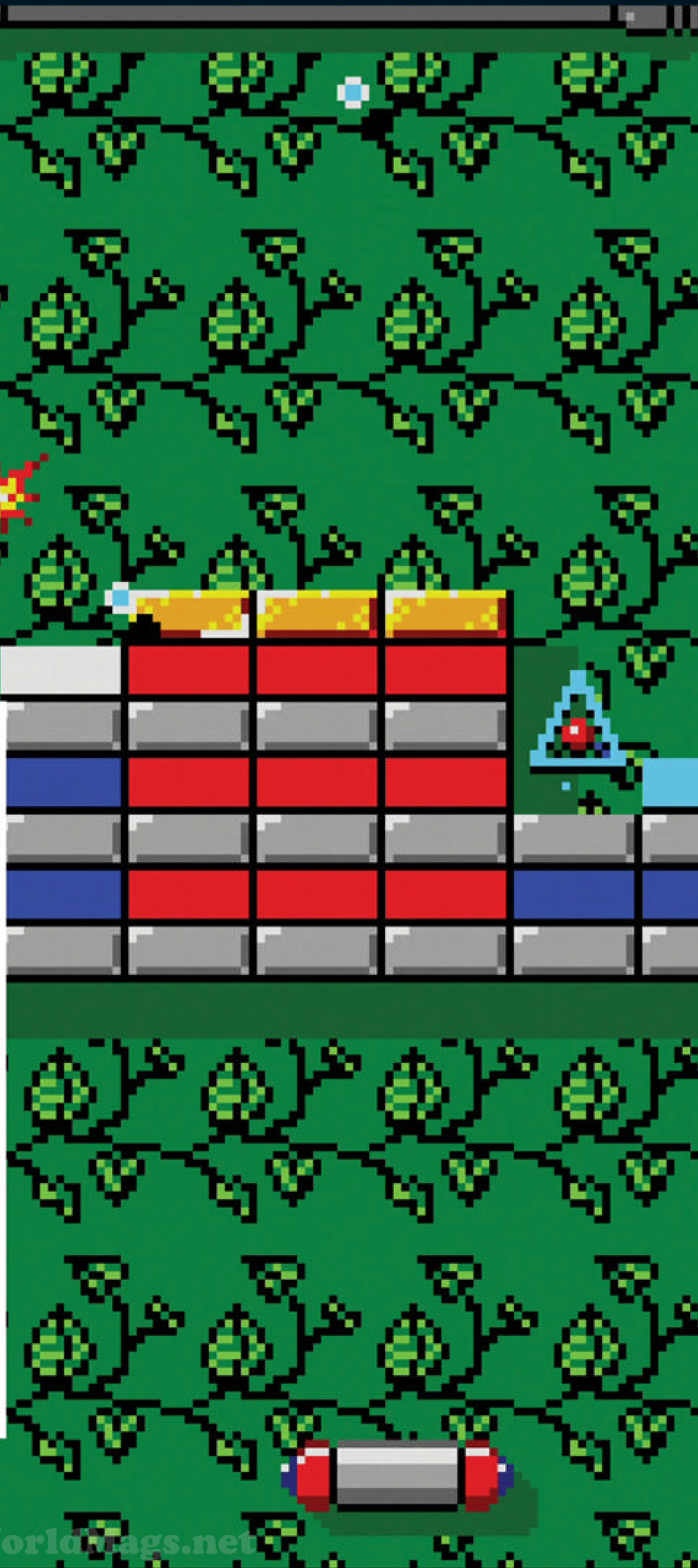
Of course, *3D Monster Maze* is important beyond the play value it provides. First-person 3D mazes were not at all common in the early Eighties, but would become widely used later in the decade and into the Nineties, by games as diverse as *Dungeon Master* and *Wolfenstein* 3D. The latter was the first step towards the establishment of the first-person shooter as a popular genre, with *Doom* later picking up the mantle. While the maze aspects of the genre have been downplayed in many of today's more popular series, which seem to favour straightforward linear corridor designs, the introduction of a maze with an autonomous enemy is still a very important evolutionary step in one of the most-played genres of games.

3D *Monster Maze* demonstrates a variety of qualities which make it very tough to argue against its placing at the top of this list. It displays clear technical mastery of the machine on which it runs, provides one of gaming's most memorable antagonists and has an enviable legacy. However, the most important thing is that it is still a whole lot of fun to play – despite the occasional incredibly stressful moment when the Tyrannosaurus Rex is heading straight for you.









Arkanoid III

BRICKING IT

RETROREVIVAL



» ATARI ST
» PETER JOHNSON / MARIO
» 1987

If there's one thing we've learned over the years, it's that fan modifications can be delightfully evil creations. We're not sure why that is, but we've got a theory – anyone who is sufficiently invested in a game to learn how it works has probably played it to death, and therefore no longer finds the difficulty level challenging. While we may or may not be correct in that assumption, modders have given us the likes of *Kaizo Mario World*, *Sonic ERaZor* and the *Doom II* WAD *Hell Revealed* – each one of which are hair-tearingly difficult challenges, and while *Arkanoid III* isn't quite as tough as those above, it is definitely capable of causing a decent level frustration.

Released by a cracker known as 'Mario', *Arkanoid III* presents a brand new set of stages that don't feature in either of the official games released on the ST, all of which offer a stiff challenge from the word go. Blocks are placed significantly lower than the official early stages, making it much harder to settle in with a power-up as you constantly scramble after the ball. Worse yet, blocks that take multiple hits to break are used liberally throughout the game – the entire bottom row of the second stage is made of them, for example.

We really like mods, but it's not hard to see how they can get quite intimidating – the level of difficulty here is just a bit too much for our untrained reflexes to deal with. On the other hand, *Arkanoid* fanatics might just love it… ✱


CRACKED AND MODIFIED BY
MARIO
1ER JOUEUR :
010370
2ME JOUEUR :
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TOP SCORE :
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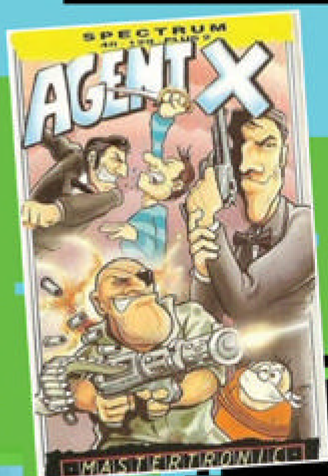
AGENT X IN THE BRAIN DRAIN CAPER

In 1985, two boys from St. Helens devised an idea for a multi-stage ZX Spectrum game that was to become one of Mastertronic's best-selling original releases. Join Graeme Mason as we peek behind the scenes of this budget spy caper

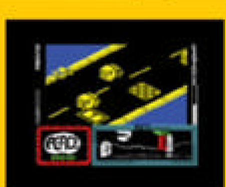


IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** MASTERTRONIC
» **DEVELOPER:** JOHN AND STEVEN TATLOCK
» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **PLATFORM:** ZX SPECTRUM
» **GENRE:** MANY



» The cover to *Agent X* was created by the talented John Smyth.



"AGENT X 101"

■ Created by brothers Steven and John Tatlock, *Agent X* is a fun game that combines numerous genres across its four missions. One stage has you dodging vehicles, another concentrates on platforming, while a third has shoot-'em-up elements. The final stage is a scroller that places you in the seat of a helicopter. It's a great compilation of games that was released at a superb price.

St. Helens town centre on a Saturday afternoon in 1981 sounds like it was the best place in the world to be. "We grew up right near the centre," says John Tatlock, one half of the coding team behind *Agent X*, "where there was a huge department store run by the Co-op, of all people," Along with this brother, Steven, John would occupy the large computer department of the store most Saturday afternoons. He continues, "Most of the other shops in town would shoo us kids away. But for whatever reason they didn't mind us going in and tinkering around for hours on the computers." Even better, the Lucky Strike arcade sat just across the road from the store. "It was always pretty up-to-date as well. So the typical thing on a Saturday was for us to spend all our money in the arcade and then go across to the department store to mess about with the computers." The teenage brothers were obviously fascinated by these new-fangled machines, although a home computer lay seemingly out of reach for their family. "Then, out of the blue, a grandmother bought us a ZX81," recalls John, "and it wasn't even a birthday or Christmas, so it was especially mind-boggling to get this thing." When they obtained a ZX Spectrum a year later, the bug fully took hold.

John credits his elder brother with the pair's initial dabblings with programming. "Steven's always been very smart with mathematics and electronics," he says, "and while I was making a desultory attempt to learn BASIC, he just got straight into writing machine code in HEX, which seemed totally unfathomable to me." As a result, John's role became design and production simply by default. "He'd be messing around making things happen on the computer, and I'd ask what he was up to and make suggestions." When the ZX Spectrum arrived and actual pixel art became a reality, John began drawing the sprites for the code that Steven was toying with. "I can't quite remember how we transitioned from just messing around with things moving on the screen into 'let's make a game'", muses John, "but we were definitely keen on the idea. Yet to 13 and 14-year-old kids, it didn't initially seem like something that you could just go ahead and do."

John and Steven's first proper completed game was a clone of one of their favourite arcade machines, ▶



» [ZX Spectrum] Agent X arrives at his destination – the Mad Prof's secret lair.

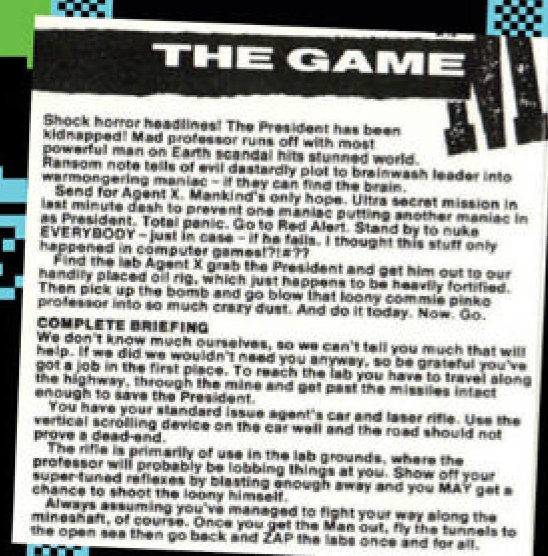


> "Steven was a big fan of the coin-op Kung Fu Master at the time so that definitely influenced the scrolling fighting part"
> John Tatlock

THE STORY OF X

The crazy tale that fuels Agent X

The peace-loving president (ok…) has been captured by the evil Mad Professor who needs funds to continue his nefarious deeds. A ransom is demanded - the punishment for non-payment? The Mad Prof will brainwash the President, turning him into a warmongering maniac! Oh no! Issued with a special agent's car and laser rifle, X must infiltrate his base, take him out and grab the prez. But that's not all - we can't leave it at that! Your final task is to retrieve a bomb from a nearby oil platform and destroy the madman's base! I thought this stuff only happened in computer games!?



THE GAME

Shock horror headlines! The President has been kidnapped! Mad professor runs off with most powerful man on Earth scandal hits stunned world. Ransom note tells of evil dastardly plot to brainwash leader into warmongering maniac – if they can find the brain.

Send for Agent X. Mankind's only hope. Ultra secret mission in last minute dash to prevent one maniac putting another maniac in as President. Total panic. Go to Red Alert. Stand by to nuke EVERYBODY – just in case – if he fails. I thought this stuff only happened in computer games!?!&??

Find the lab Agent X grab the President and get him out to our handily placed oil rig, which just happens to be heavily fortified. Then pick up the bomb and go blow that loony commie pinko professor into so much crazy dust. And do it today. Now. Go.

COMPLETE BRIEFING

We don't know much ourselves, so we can't tell you much that will help. If we did we wouldn't need you anyway, so be grateful you've got a job in the first place. To reach the lab you have to travel along the highway, through the mine and get past the missiles intact enough to save the President.

You have your standard issue agent's car and laser rifle. Use the vertical scrolling device on the car well and the road should not prove a dead-end.

The rifle is primarily of use in the lab grounds, where the professor will probably be lobbing things at you. Show off your super-tuned reflexes by blasting enough away and you MAY get a chance to shoot the loony himself.

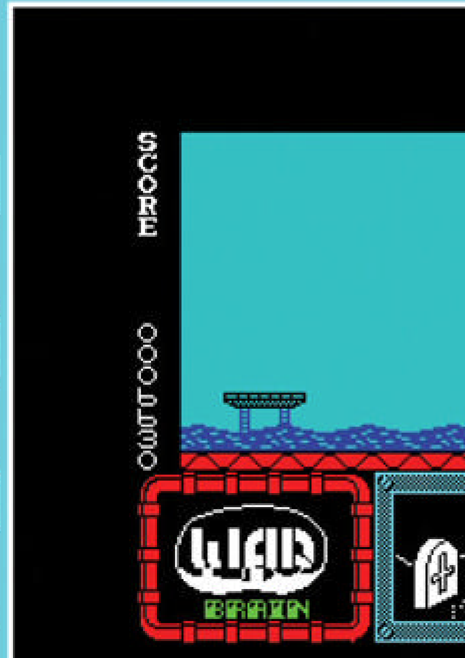
Always assuming you've managed to fight your way along the mineshaft, of course. Once you get the Man out, fly the tunnels to the open sea then go back and ZAP the labs once and for all.

MASTERTRONIC'S BUDGET BLOCKBUSTERS

Small prices, but big sales

It was the indisputable king of budget games in the Eighties – but apart from *Agent X*, what were its biggest sellers? Leaving aside re-releases such as *Ghostbusters* (which sold enough copies to fill a converted old fire station), Mastertronic's greatest sellers didn't always tally up with its best games. For instance, while KP Skips' tie-in *Action Biker* sold almost 100,000 copies on the Commodore 64, its lamentable ZX Spectrum conversion only just followed behind in terms of sales. Meanwhile *BMX Racers* (coded by the Darling brothers) was its most outstanding early success, selling 345,423 copies across its three formats, C16, C64 and Spectrum. Mastertronic's lack of advertising and review space (matters entirely unconnected, of course) often meant sales of poorer games were driven purely by the price and cover artwork. In this respect they excelled, with its games retailing for between £1.99 and £2.99 and all featuring professional and enticing covers.





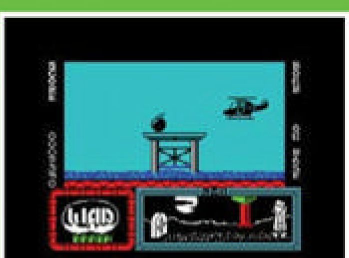
» [ZX Spectrum] Not the smoothest of transitions from the base to outside.

Time Pilot. Pleased with their effort, but with little idea of what to actually do with the game, they took it to a local computer shop which they knew had previously published games. John recalls: "Steven approached them and they knocked it back, but said to come back when we had something else." Encouraged, the boys got to work on their next project which was one of a mass of ideas stemming from their youthful enthusiasm. "Steven was a big fan of the coin-op *Kung Fu Master* at the time," remembers John, "so that definitely influenced the scrolling fighting part." This section was just one of four parts to *Agent X* that were each loaded separately. First the intrepid Agent X had to negotiate a dangerous road to the villain's hideout in an isometric driving section. Once in the enemy's lair, the player had to fend off attacks from a host lethal robots before finally confronting the villainous Mad Professor himself in a first-person shooting level. The game concludes with Agent X hopping on board a helicopter and delivering a bomb to the professor's base and ending his evil plan once and for all.

"We were influenced principally by other games as at the time there were a bunch of these multi-load, multi-event games kicking around," explains John, "and I think we quite liked the idea that the different stages gave us the freedom to do all these different things without running into too many file size and memory issues."

> "I actually imagined [Agent X] as this kind of Leonard Rossiter figure"
> John Tatlock

Agent X himself is portrayed as a rather downbeat laconic character, an image that the boys deliberately fostered. "The actual character was heavily influenced by a book I read called *The Spy And The Diabolical Plot* by Philip Freeman Sayer," says John, "which is about a completely incompetent spy who always ends up defeating the bad guys by accident. I actually imagined him as this kind of Leonard Rossiter figure," he says, "so we didn't even give him a gun. The central vision was that he was pretty useless, slumped-shouldered and unenthusiastic, so firing a gun would be too much like hard work."



» [ZX Spectrum] Grab the bomb and hot foot back to the Mad Prof's lair.



» [ZX Spectrum] Shooting the Mad Prof's missiles made him an angry man.

The design of the levels and gameplay was a collaborative effort with John even occasionally chipping in with coding advice. "We used to talk about ideas all the time and also the logic of what the code was doing as a bit of a bug-solving method," he says. As with many coders of the era, the creation process was very improvisational and technically-led. Steven would work out a technique and the gameplay would be suited around it. "For the record, this is not the way to make great games in my opinion," says John, "but at the time we were learning and doing whatever took our fancy."

Steven and John developed *Agent X* in between school commitments, but the task never became onerous. "It was loads of fun, and we were really into it." Says John. "We were just trying out different things, and also, ahem, ripping off different things. It's easy to see what was on our minds." The design for the initial level is succinctly summed up in Hollywood one-sentence pitch style: '*Highway Encounter* with scrolling'. "Of course, it's not in the same league as that game," he says modestly, "but that's definitely why it has the aesthetic it does." With the second level influenced by Steven's love of scrolling beat-'em-up *Kung Fu Master*, and the final stage owing more than a little to another classic arcade game in *Choplifter*, there was no denying the derivative nature of *Agent X*. What did set it apart were little design touches such as its iconic life meter. "I liked the ridiculous morbidity of it," explains John, "as it had this guy with a constantly-lit cigarette literally shuffling towards his own grave, hands shoved in his pockets. I was a somewhat macabre child, but it really made me laugh." This, combined with its humour and spy theme, set *Agent X* to become an excellent start for the two brothers.

But of course, *Agent X* was actually their second game, and the brothers duly returned to the local shop where they had taken their *Time Pilot* clone. John grimaces as he recalls what happened next. "When we went back with *Agent X*, they accepted it but gave us a fairly derisory payment. They then sold the game on to Mastertronic and pocketed whatever else came." A lesson learned for the young games creators and John refuses to name names, even today. "They don't deserve the oxygen of publicity. Nor the regular type of oxygen for that matter." The only aspect that the

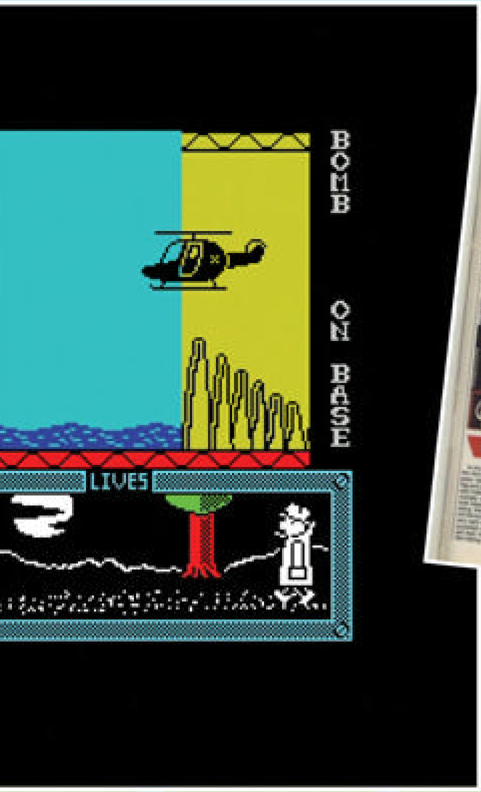


DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

TIME FLIGHT (THE POWER HOUSE)
SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1986

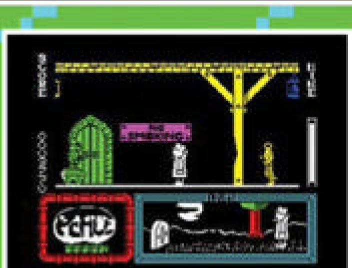
AGENT X II
SYSTEM: SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD, COMMODORE 64
YEAR: 1987

CHRONOS (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1987

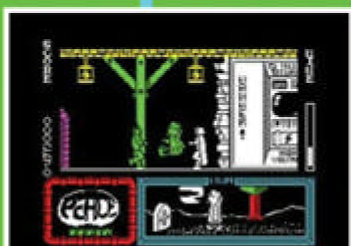




» *Agent X* received positive reviews and some of the best scores for a Mastertronic game.



» [ZX Spectrum] Agent X flagrantly defies the non-smoking signs as he makes his way through the mine.



» [ZX Spectrum] The super spy boasted a useful flying kick to despatch enemies.

nameless intermediary did inadvertently create was *Agent X*'s excellent sound and music. "Tim [Follin] was doing work for them as well and Tim is, as everyone who reads **Retro Gamer** will know, absolutely brilliant. The multi-channel music he came up with on the Spectrum was just a stroke of genius and he didn't just write the music, but also the code to make it work."

Mastertronic soon realised it had a product on its hands that was of a higher standard than many of its usual releases and did its best to ensure many magazines all carried reviews. Praise was reserved for the *Agent X*'s graphics, sound and variety. "As soon as we finished it we thought we should have concentrated on one or two sections," says John, "as we basically ended up making four sort-of unfinished games in one, rather than one really good one." Another criticism, albeit an unusual criticism, was the game's ease of completion. John explains: "We were winging it in terms of process and we didn't really think of things such as play testing and gameplay balancing back then, It was more like 'right, that's done, send it off.'"

Agent X sold just under 65,000 copies for the ZX Spectrum, putting it in Mastertronic's top ten sellers for original games on the Sinclair computer. After both getting jobs at developer Software Creations, they then produced a sequel titled *Agent X II: The Mad Prof's Back*, which was also published by Mastertronic. The brothers still remain in game development today having developed for a multitude of formats such as the Amiga, Atari ST, SNES, Game Boy Advance and Xbox in their respective careers.

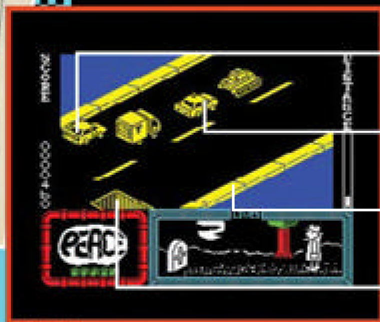
John concludes: "With *Agent X*, what I am most proud of is that at the age of 13 and 14 we managed to make something and eventually we got it released. We did all of the work ourselves and all the business ourselves. We got a lot wrong in both those areas, but I still think the fact that we did it is pretty remarkable." ★

Our thanks to John Tatlock for his time in talking to us.

AGENT X BREAKDOWN

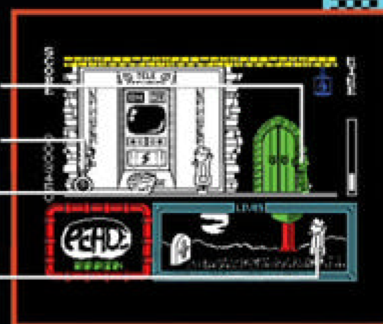
We examine every mini-game

PART 1



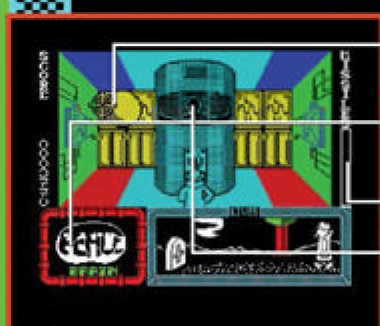
- This is X's nifty little sports car. It's unarmed, but it can perform a handy nimble leap.
- Police cars follow X, while there are also other dangers on the road.
- Get pushed into the kerb by another vehicle and Agent X takes another step towards his doom.
- In addition to other road users, X must also avoid traps such as this lethal chasm.

PART 2



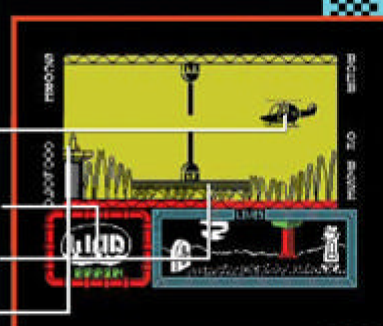
- Once in the mine, X is attacked from both sides by robots…
- Not to mention henchmen on unicycles. Of course.
- Runaway mine carts also prove troublesome to our languid hero.
- X's remaining life is represented here as he moves towards his grave every time a bad guy gets him.

PART 3



- From behind the walls these strange shapes attack X as he finally confronts the mad professor.
- The president's brain, slowly being washed by the Mad Prof. Hurry up X!
- When this meter is full, X gets a crack at the mad man himself.
- The mad professor himself, mistakenly under the belief he is safe behind a window.

PART 4



- Having half-inched a chopper, X makes his way to a platform in the sea upon which sits a bomb. Return it to the base and POW!
- There's not much time left! The president's brain has almost completely turned to 'War'!
- Fortunately these moving walls are easy to negotiate.
- These Scramble-esque missiles dog X's every move in the chopper.

THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home





» Enemies begin to flood the screen quite early on in *Demon Front*. You'll definitely need to make use of your pet's shield mode to survive the most hectic scenes.

» These hearts are released any time you hit with a pet attack or knife attack, and build the shield gauge in the top-left corner, helping you to withstand scenes like this one.

» These blue bubbles are a homing attack from your pet. The different pet attacks seem to be the only distinguishing feature between the four available characters.

» This looks and feels like a boss screen, but isn't – you'll be surprised how long it takes before you encounter your first one, thanks to the length of the stages.



DEMON FRONT

■ **Developer:** IGS ■ **Year:** 2002 ■ **Genre:** Run-and-gun

■ **They say that first impressions are important, and *Demon Front* makes one that is hard to forget – just one look will have you convinced that the game is a shameless *Metal Slug* clone.** That's an impression that persists when you actually play it, as there's a distinct set of similarities between the two games that goes beyond the similar art style. The shared use of huge bosses, the near-identical selection of weaponry and the copycat controls all contribute towards the idea that this is idea theft of the highest order. Of course, if you're going to clone anything, choosing an excellent game like *Metal Slug* is definitely the way to go.

The game does actually contain some unique elements, though. These primarily revolve around the pets that accompany each character, which replace grenades and have a dual purpose. Holding down the fire button charges them up for a special attack, the effect of which depends on your choice of character – one will unleash homing shots, while another will just hover ahead of you. This levels up as you kill enemies with ranged weapons, producing more powerful attacks.

The second function for pets is use as a shield, which remains active from the time you press the button until you manually deactivate it or it runs out of energy. Increasing the shield duration is handled by killing enemies with your close-range weapon or pet attacks.

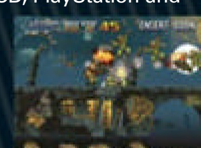
Demon Front is a worthy competitor to *Metal Slug*, based largely on the fact that it copies so much of the formula, from the beautiful sprites to the time-tested game design. However, it does fail to match its inspiration in some areas. *Demon Front*'s forgettable music doesn't come close to matching any of the excellent *Metal Slug* tune, and stage design is slightly weaker all-round – in part, this is due to the excessive length of the stages. It's certainly worth your attention if you've exhausted SNK's series, though.

The lack of a home conversion for *Demon Front* can be attributed to the fact that it was produced by IGS, a company which is only active in the arcade market and doesn't tend to licence its games. It's a shame, because more people should have the opportunity to play this obscure gem.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

METAL SLUG 1996

If you're hankering after some explosive action, *Metal Slug* has been converted rather widely. The Neo Geo cartridge will set you back a pretty penny, but it is also available on Neo Geo CD, PlayStation and Saturn. Additionally, it's available on *Metal Slug Anthology* for PS2 PSP and Wii, and a variety of download services for consoles.



FAST LANE

■ **Developer:** Konami ■ **Year:** 1987 ■ **Genre:** Maze



» [Arcade] We must have missed the controversy about running over skaters for power-ups…

■ ***Fast Lane* feels almost like an anachronis.** The straightforward maze game was fast becoming an endangered species by the late Eighties, and *Fast Lane* is a spin on *Head On* – a game which found success in the late Seventies, a time before even *Pac-Man* had made its mark. Much as in *Head On*, your red sports car travels anti-clockwise around a maze and is only able to change lanes when not blocked by walls. Attempting to impede your progress is a blue monster truck, which travels clockwise. Once you've cleared the road, grass or blockage, you'll move on to the next stage.

The game differentiates itself from its inspiration with a variety of stage designs and a *Gradius*-like system of power-ups. These are collected by running over the women rollerskating around each stage, and allow your car to jump, ram and even shoot the monster trucks. These features make *Fast Lane* one of the best *Head On* variants to be found, but the fact that it was a *Head On* variant at all likely condemned the game to its unconverted status – after all, maze games just weren't the fashionable games to be making.

SURF PLANET

■ **Developer:** Gaelco ■ **Year:** 1997 ■ **Genre:** Racing

■ **We're not quite sure why a snowboarding game is called *Surf Planet*, but beneath the odd name lies a reasonable little racer.** Each of the four stages takes place across some of the most open slopes of the late Nineties and offers a balance between straight racing routes and trick points. While it might be tempting to ignore performing tricks and just take the fastest route to the goal, performing tricks actually allows you to gather wax for your board, which helps to maintain speed – making them vital to reaching checkpoints and besting your three rivals.

It's not perfect by any means, as there's some very ropey animation on show and the game surprisingly uses an analogue joystick instead of a dedicated snowboard controller, which feels like a big oversight. That said, the game does provide some nice visual set pieces and is good fun while it lasts, which automatically elevates it above much of Gaelco's output. However, it's easy to see why *Surf Planet* never received a home release – a large amount of work would have been required to give it enough content to be competitive with the snowboarding titles available on home consoles at the time, such as the *Cool Boarders* series and *1080° Snowboarding*.



» [Arcade] While *Surf Planet*'s scenery isn't the most outlandish, it provides some exciting moments all the same.

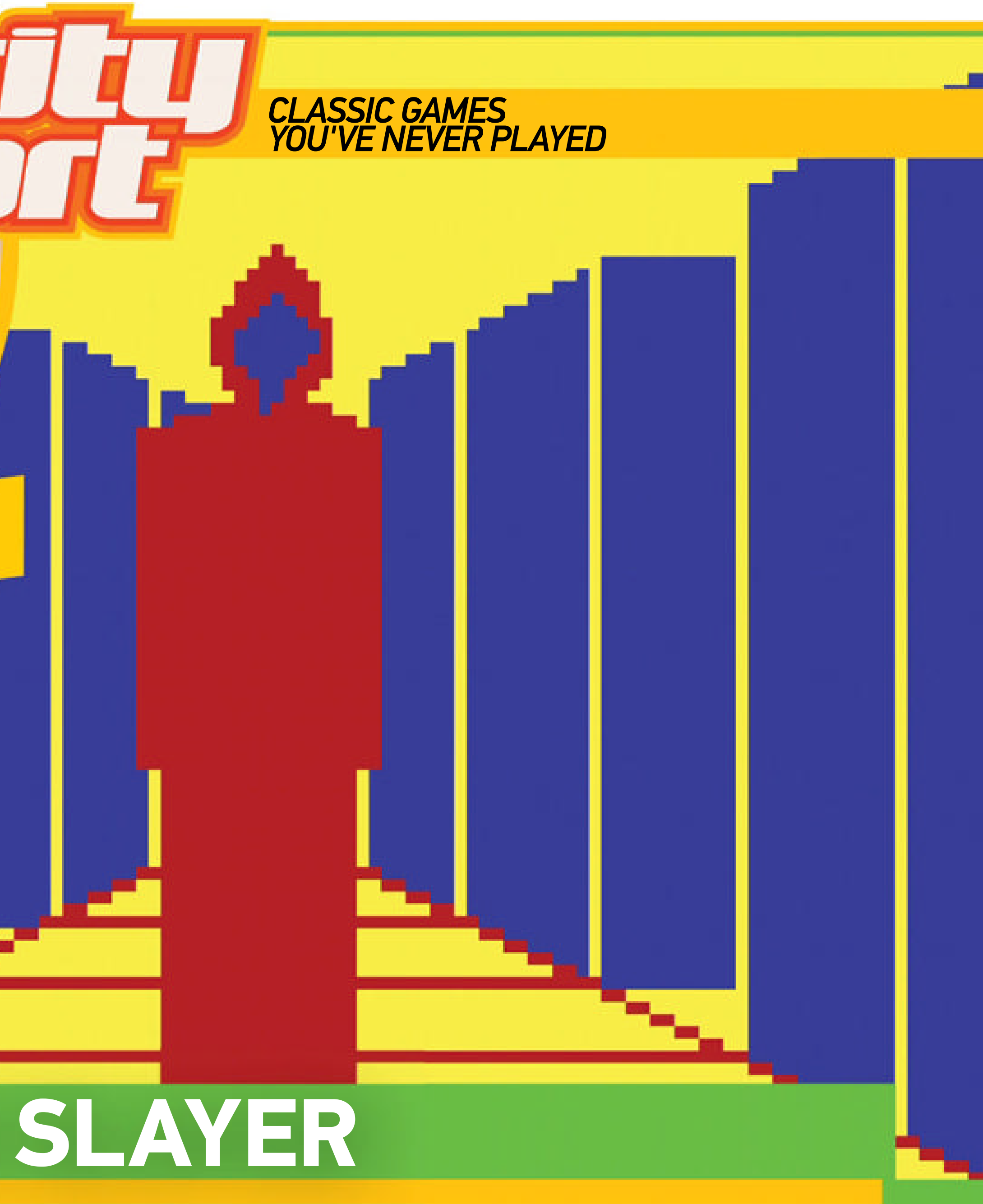
Minority Report

CLASSIC GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED



DRAGON 32

With its proper keyboard and robust exterior the Dragon looked like a professional computer, but were there any good games available for this serious-looking slab of Welsh engineering? Martyn Carroll investigates

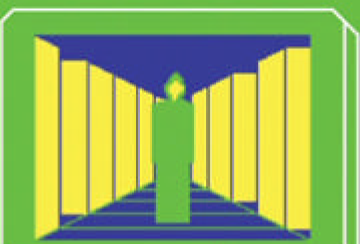


PHANTOM SLAYER

■ DEVELOPER: MED SYSTEMS ■ YEAR: 1983

■ **WHEN IT CAME** to software, Dragon users were much better off than owners of other also-rans like the Jupiter Ace, Camputers Lynx or Tatung Einstein. This was largely due to a crucial American connection. The Dragon hardware was based on the same reference design as the popular Tandy Color Computer (or CoCo), with both machines powered by the Motorola 6809 processor. This meant that it was possible to convert CoCo games to run on the Dragon without too much effort. UK software houses picked up on this and would appropriate successful American games and localise them for the Dragon. The most popular of these companies was Microdeal. If the Commodore 64 had US Gold then the Dragon had Microdeal.

Microdeal brought the work of prominent CoCo programmer Ken Kalish to the attention of British gamers. *Phantom Slayer* was his finest title and it was one of the earliest examples of a 3D corridor game. This approach was so novel that some end user handholding was required. "Look into your monitor as though you were looking down a hallway", instructed the game, just in case you were expecting the usual top-down maze action. It wasn't so inventive if you'd already experienced the similar *3D Monster Maze* on the ZX81, but there was a notable difference in tone. That game was a spectacle, with its big T-Rex bounding around the maze trying to chomp you. *Phantom Slayer,* in comparison, was downright sinister.



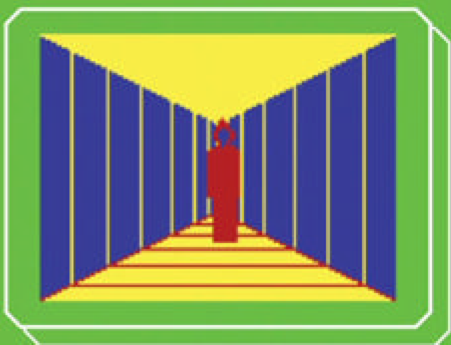
» [Dragon 32] There's a manic enemy rush sequence at the end of each stage.



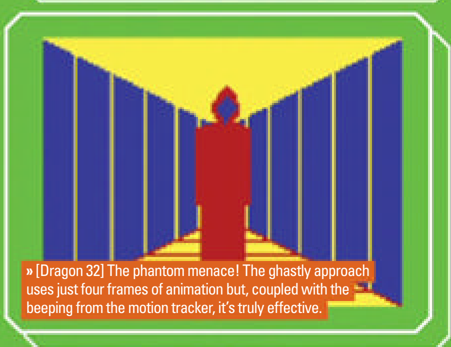
» [Dragon 32] The initials JD, tagged on the ontainers, belong to the game's coder Jorg Dierks.

> "You were dropped into a maze with three phantoms who would slowly yet relentlessly pursue you"

You were dropped into a randomised maze with three 'phantoms' who would slowly yet relentlessly pursue you. You had two items to help you besides your wits. The first was a tracking device which would slowly beep (and instantly crank up the tension) when a phantom was lurking nearby; you also had a gun which you could use to blast phantoms into oblivion. The problem was that the advancing phantoms often took multiple shots to kill and your gun would take a few seconds to recharge after each shot. So to survive you had to shoot, retreat a few steps back and shoot again. If you ran out of room you'd have to spin around and scarper, while hoping you didn't take a wrong turn and run headfirst into another phantom. When you did score

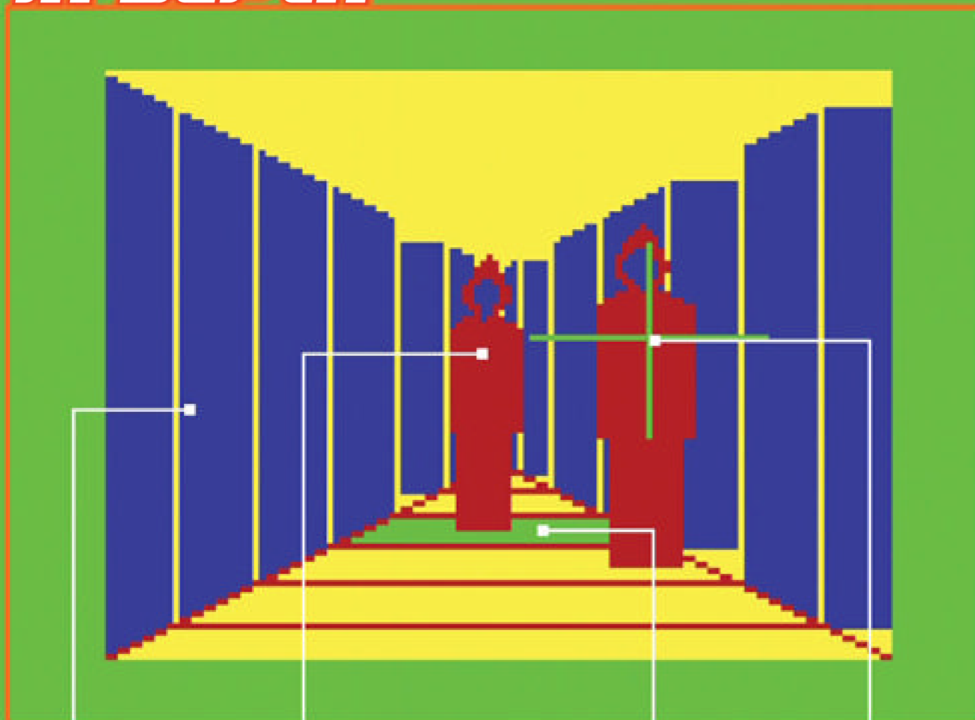






» [Dragon 32] The phantom menace! The ghastly approach uses just four frames of animation but, coupled with the beeping from the motion tracker, it's truly effective.

IN DEPTH



JEEPERS!

■ This is the nightmarish maze in which you're trapped. There are two types – a simple maze with long corridors and a twisty alternative where it's all too easy to get cornered.

CREEPERS!

■ The hooded phantoms will make your flesh creep. They're slow, so you can outrun them, but you must ultimately kill them to survive. When there's more than one you're doomed!

LEAPERS!

■ In each maze you will find a magic green tile which will warp you back to your starting point. If you're being pursued by one or more phantoms, this can be a real life-saver.

PEEPERS!

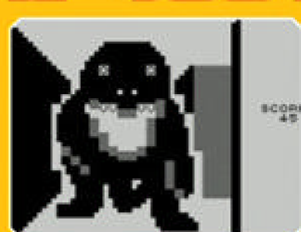
■ The gun-sights appear on screen when you draw your weapon. The nearest phantom is automatically targeted so you need to shoot quickly and wait for your gun to recharge.



a successful kill, another more powerful phantom would simply materialise elsewhere in the maze and the nightmare continued.

It was a classic cat and mouse scenario and it's hardly surprising to learn that Ken was inspired by horror movies, in particular a vampire chase sequence from Sixties film *The Fearless Vampire Killers*. For those players that grew up in the UK in the Seventies the game may well evoke memories of that harrowing public information film which warned kids about the dangers of playing near water. That cloaked, faceless phantom could very well be the infamous 'Spirit Of Dark And Lonely Water', ready to trap the unwary, the show-off or the fool. Spook!

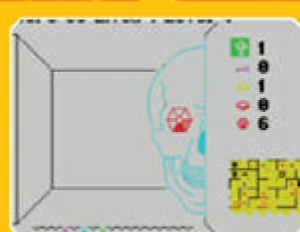
IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



3D MONSTER MAZE

ZX81

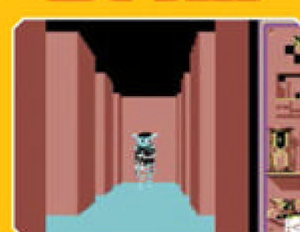
■ People will delight in telling you that this wasn't the first corridor-style game, but damn it if this wasn't the one most of us first remember seeing. Released in 1981, it featured *you* being hunted by a T-Rex in a 3D maze and the whole thing was surely too impressive and immersive to be running on a lowly ZX81.



SKULL

SPECTRUM

■ This obscure release from 1984 saw you raiding tombs while avoiding a skull whose gleaming eyes would kill you on sight. Cleverly, the tomb was many levels deep so you could descend to discover the best artefacts. Not particularly scary or technically impressive, it was an interesting adventure nonetheless.



SCARABAEUS

COMMODORE 64

■ If *3D Monster Maze* was the precursor to *Phantom Slayer*, then this title from 1985 can be seen as a fitting follow-up. It shared the same premise – you're trapped in an underground maze with various terrors – and added objectives, puzzles and nicely atmospheric music. The 3D effect was also fantastic.

Minority Report

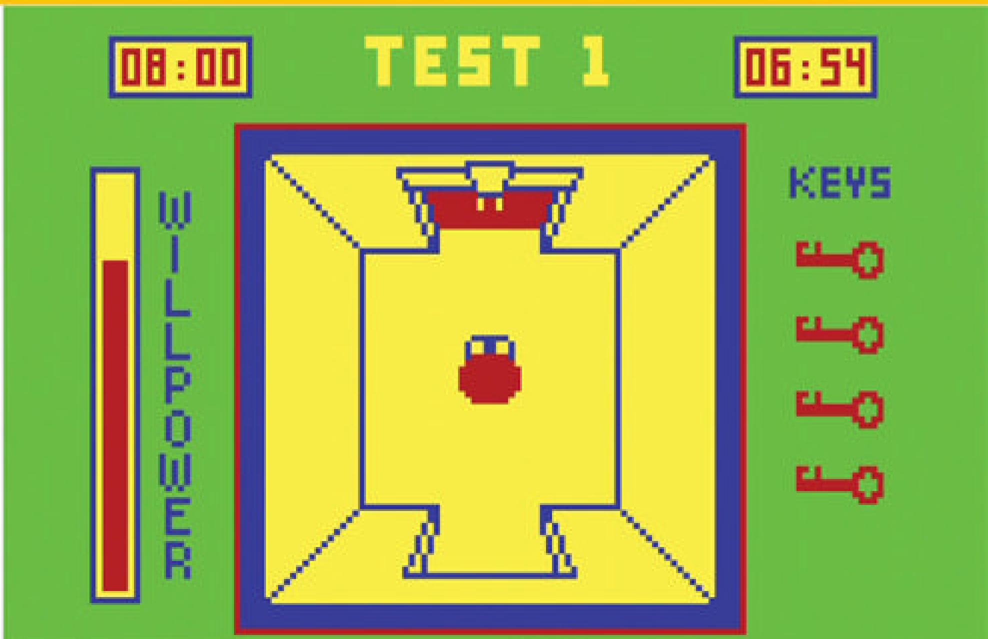
BACKTRACK

■ DEVELOPER: INCENTIVE SOFTWARE ■ YEAR: 1985

■ **Never has a game had a more fitting title.** You played Eddie, a kid dropped into a series of random mazes as part of some weird experiment. To escape you needed to find several numbered keys which would unlock the exit door – the snag being that the keys had to be collected in the correct order. So you would track, backtrack and then backtrack some more through a series of almost identical-looking rooms. There were a few enemies to avoid but the emphasis was on exploration. If you were lucky you would manage to find the map early on which showed the maze layout and the exit door, but obviously not the keys themselves. That would, of course, be too easy and to the detriment of all the joyous backtracking.

It may sound slightly tedious but it was anything but. *Backtrack* was a delightful little game, full of pleasing detail and humour. In particular, the 3D effect as you moved between rooms was really well done. It's not surprising to discover that the game's author, Chris Andrew, would further experiment with 3D in his later titles. After *Backtrack*, he moved over to the Amstrad CPC where he created the Freescape system that ran games like *Driller* and *Total Eclipse*.

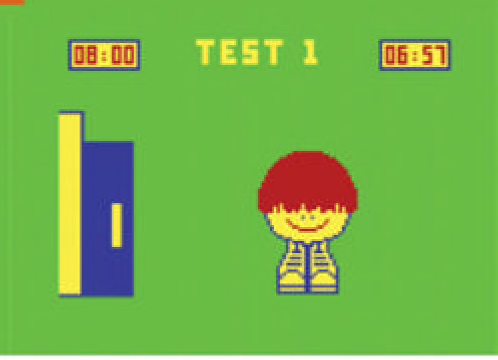
> "Backtrack was a delightful little game, full of pleasing detail and humour"



» [Dragon32] The maze exit door. Luckily you have all four keys required to unlock it.

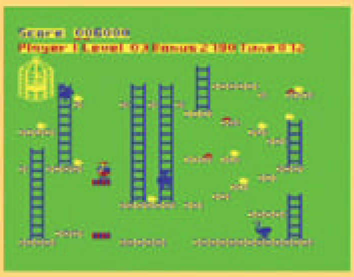


» [Dragon32] The invaluable map should be the first thing you try and locate.



» [Dragon 32] That's one big pair of shoes…

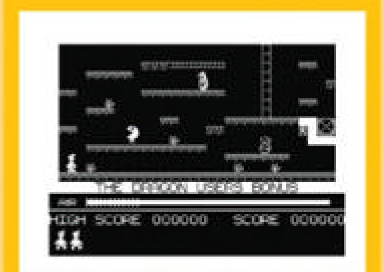
MORE GAMES TO PLAY



» CHUCKIE EGG

■ DEVELOPER: A&F SOFTWARE
■ YEAR: 1983

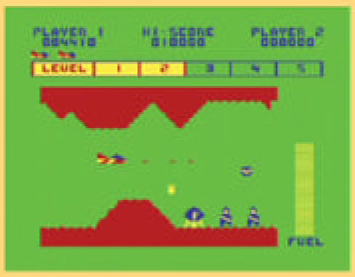
■ **It's a debate** that's raged for millennia (okay, decades): which was the best version of *Chuckie Egg*? To be honest, all of the versions were very good and the Dragon game was no exception, featuring a rather rotund Harry who was still able to perform his henhouse duties with speed and style. Even the most ardent Speccy or Beeb fans couldn't sneer at the Dragon version, even if that garish background made them feel queasy.



» MANIC MINER

■ DEVELOPER: SOFTWARE PROJECTS
■ YEAR: 1984

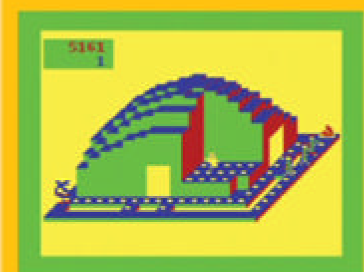
■ **The classic Spectrum** platformer was faithfully recreated on the Dragon. What this version lacked in colour – it was monochrome due to using the Dragon's high-resolution modes – it made up for with additional screens. After the twentieth screen, there are two exclusive caverns: the one above and one named 'The End'. Author Roy Coates went even further with the Dragon version of *Jet Set Willy*, adding an extra 15 rooms.



» SKRAMBLE

■ DEVELOPER: MICRODEAL
■ YEAR: 1983

■ **There were some** official arcade conversions on the Dragon (*Hunchback* and *Moon Cresta* spring to mind) but most were rip-offs. When it came to brazen titles this one was a classic – as was the game itself. It was a pretty much perfect rendition of the trend-setting Konami shooter with bold graphics and all of the coin-op's features included. The only minus point was the difficulty level – it was a touch too easy.



» ICE CASTLES

■ DEVELOPER: SPECTRAL ASSOCIATES
■ YEAR: 1984

■ **Another coin-op clone,** this time of Atari favourite *Crystal Castles*. But you know that just by looking at the screenshot, because not only did this game borrow the gameplay from the coin-op, it also copies the level layouts! The player character was different though – Bently Bear rather than Bentley Bear, see. This was one of those games were the Dragon's colour palette worked to make the 3D effect jump off the screen.

TIME BANDIT

■ DEVELOPER: MICHTRON ■ YEAR: 1984

■ **THE DRAGON HARDWARE was well suited to replicating coin-ops and there was a glut of faithful yet unofficial conversions.** *Time Bandit* was an original game but it very much had the look and feel of an early coin-op, with its small sprites and maze-based play. However, beneath the surface lay a surprising amount of invention.

You began in a hub from which you could warp to three themed worlds (Western, Fantasy and Space). Each of the worlds had multiple areas and each area had multiple phases, so in total there were 300 separate levels for players to tackle. Completing a level basically involved locating the key (or keys) required to unlock the exit door. You also had to contend with many pesky monsters and a rapidly-decreasing time limit.

Once you got the hang of the game (and the fact that you could only shoot horizontally) it was possible spend many enjoyable hours playing *Time Bandit*. The game had an actual ending too, so players had something to aim towards rather than just clocking the highest score and thus earning bragging right among friends. And if all this all sounds strangely familiar then you might be thinking about the Amiga and Atari ST update of *Time Bandit* that arrived in 1988.



» [Dragon 32] This is the hub where the game begins. From here you can access the three different worlds.



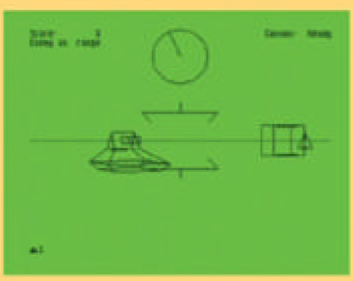
» [Dragon 32] There are two locks between you and the exit, so you need to locate a couple of separate keys.

RETRO STINKER

» VEGAS JACKPOT

■ DEVELOPER: MASTERTRONIC ■ YEAR: 1984

■ **Was there a** more pointless computer game than a fruit machine simulator? Even if the idea of winning pretend money appealed, this Dragon release was beyond basic and generally terrible.



» ROMMEL'S REVENGE

■ DEVELOPER: DESIGN DESIGN
■ YEAR: 1984

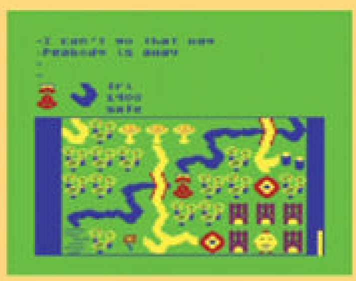
■ **The game was** selected for two reasons: it delivered an excellent take on Atari's *Battlezone* coin-op, and it showed that the Dragon could handle demanding wireframe graphics. The Dragon version was slightly faster than the Spectrum version, although some details were missing. It's a shame there weren't more vector-style games on the machine.



» JUXTAPOSITION - BARONS OF CETI V

■ DEVELOPER: WINTERSOFT
■ YEAR: 1985

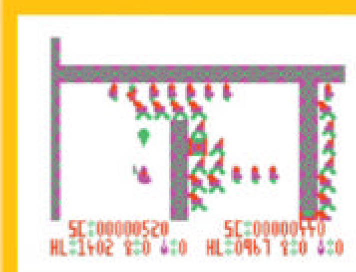
■ **The Dragon had** a decent keyboard making it great for text adventures. However, the standard hardware would only output capital letters, so adventures were often ugly and, well, a bit shouty. This enjoyable title featured both lower-case text and illustrations The game was the first of a proposed series but the sequel, *Usurper Of Rune*, was never released.



» TANGLEWOOD

■ DEVELOPER: MICRODEAL
■ YEAR: 1987

■ **Legend has it** that this adventure was initially based on the BBC TV cartoon *Willo The Wisp*, but the deal fell apart and it became *Tanglewood* with renamed characters. The game offered a mix of styles, with the main RPG view (where you could switch between five characters) leading to maze sections and arcade challenges. It was baffling but worth persevering with. A follow-up for the Amiga and Atari ST arrived two years later.



» GLOVE

■ DEVELOPER: JAMES MCKAY
■ YEAR: 2007

■ **It's *Gauntlet* on** the Dragon, or as good as. This remarkable homebrew release showed what the hardware was capable off. The scrolling was smooth and the action was fast, with hardly any slowdown even when the screen was swarming with enemies. The game also took advantage of the extra memory of the Dragon 64 if detected. In 2009 author McKay release an equally amazing Dragon version of *Deathchase*.


20 YEARS



STAR WARS DARK FORCES AND THE JEDI KNIGHT SERIES

Ian Dransfield talks to those who made the brilliant Dark Forces/Jedi Knight series to find out why was the Force so strong in this one?

If ever a series shouldn't have been cast aside, it was that comprising of the *Dark Forces* and *Jedi Knight* games. Not one of its five entries: *Dark Forces* (1995), *Dark Forces II: Jedi Knight* (1997), *Dark Forces II: Jedi Knight – Mysteries Of The Sith* (1998), *Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast* (2002) and *Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy* (2003) – were in any way bad, each of them receiving critical acclaim on release and all of them still being held up as great examples of how to do good by a licensed franchise.

But why? At the core, these were all fairly straightforward shooters – the original *Star Wars: Dark Forces* was essentially a *Doom* clone. It was a straight-up shooter with a pistol, a rapid-fire weapon, explosives, and all that. It also had puzzle-solving elements. But two things helped the game rise above: smart design, and *Star Wars*.

Everyone wanted to play a *Star Wars* game in the style of *Doom* – even those who made *Doom*, as Matthew Tateishi, a level designer on both *Dark Forces* and *Jedi Knight*, remembered: "I remember the team getting an email from John Romero after he had played through *Dark Forces* – he said something like 'now I know how people felt when they played *Doom* for the first time.'"

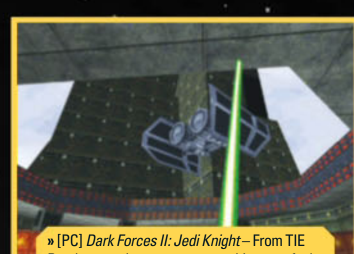
That *Star Wars* element meant more benefits than some might have hoped for – an established universe with reams of backstory and decades of development is a rich vein to mine, creatively speaking. Jarrod Showers had finished work on *Soldier Of Fortune 2* – now tasked with the role of lead animator on *Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy*, he found that the real world was somewhat lacking compared to that of a galaxy far, far away: "While modelling the Rancor, I remember thinking ▶



» [PC] *Dark Forces* – The original game kicks off with a fantastic level that has you attempting to retrieve the Deathstar plans.



» [PC] *Dark Forces* – The cutscenes found throughout the first game are excellent, and really add to the immersion.



» [PC] *Dark Forces II: Jedi Knight* – From TIE Bombers to character cameos, this game feels like an authentic *Star Wars* adventure.



THE MOMENTS THAT MATTER

The memories that will stay with us forever. Which ones do you remember?

TAKING OUT A STORMTROOPER

■ The first time you blast a Stormtrooper in *Dark Forces* is blissful; almost something that makes you feel like you belong with the likes of Skywalker and Solo.





GETTING A LIGHTSABER FOR FIRST TIME

■ It doesn't come until the second instalment, but this touching moment is probably the most memorable moment from any of the *Dark Forces/Jedi Knight* saga.



» [PC] Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy – Creating your own Jedi was a great addition to Jedi Academy, and included choosing your own lightsaber.

there was more reference stuff to work off of in *Star Wars* than there was for the real world guns in *Soldier Of Fortune*!"

It was a great playground to work within, Jarrod went on to say, though he did point out some elements of the universe were off-limits, like using Han Solo in any way, shape or form. "But then there were times we could bring in iconic characters like Luke Skywalker and Boba Fett," he added, "That made it feel like we were actually contributing to the universe we all loved."

The love of the universe was something that would be expected of many who worked on the *Dark Forces/Jedi Knight* games. Kevin Schmitt, now senior designer at 343 Industries, worked on *Jedi Knight: Mysteries Of The Sith* and *Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast*. He was also a devout superfan of the *Star Wars* franchise. "The three original level designers on *Mysteries Of The Sith* got a little worried when I pulled up with my personalized plates (MTFBEWY: May The Force BE With You)... But I finally had a venue for all the *Star Wars* knowledge I had stored up for so many years."

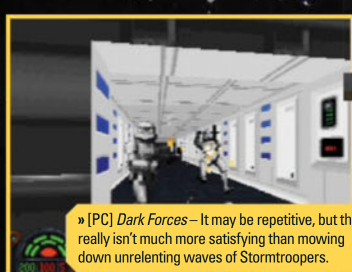
While Disney might have nuked all of the expanded universe mythology, it doesn't change the fact that – back in the day – these were people, often *Star War* fans, who were working on, adding to and enriching the universe they cared deeply about. "We would often spread that resource material all over the floor and look for ideas and ways to tie things into the existing *Star Wars* universe," Kevin continued, "Since I had such a passion for it, I thought I owed it to the franchise to stay as true to the source material as possible. I was in heaven."

Playing with an entire universe of someone else's creation, you might expect the man himself – George Lucas – to have some involvement in the *Dark Forces/Jedi Knight* games. Not so, said Kevin – in fact, George Lucas wasn't really involved with production at all back then. "There's a funny anecdote Daron Stinnett, project director of *Dark Forces*, told me," Kevin recalled, "The local news wanted to get a story on George and *Dark Forces*. He sat down and played it while they filmed it. When the interview was over, he leaned over to Daron and said 'This is really violent!' From then on I don't think he was too interested in [*Star Wars*] games until around The *Force Unleashed*."

While the man who put his name to the studio wasn't directly involved in the various productions, it didn't mean it was all smooth sailing.

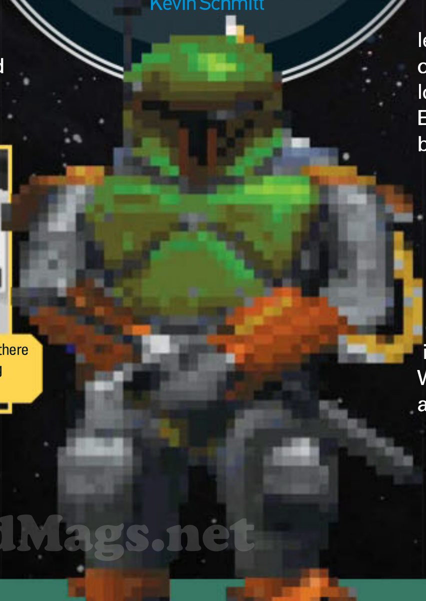


» [PC] *Dark Forces* – Dropped into the pit of Jabba's palace, Kyle Katarn has to fight this beast with his fists. Unless you enter a cheat code... ahem.



» [PC] *Dark Forces* – It may be repetitive, but there really isn't much more satisfying than mowing down unrelenting waves of Stormtroopers.

> "I finally had a venue for all the Star Wars knowledge I had stored up for so many years"
> Kevin Schmitt



Each of the five *Dark Forces/Jedi Knight* titles carried a fair bit of baggage with it, thanks in no small part to licensing. While the games were based on *Star Wars* and being made by – or in close conjunction with – Lucas's own company, there were still restrictions, hoops to be jumped through and arguments to be had.

Kevin pointed out two of the less impactful restrictions placed on development: "We did have a longstanding 'no mistreatment of Ewok' policy in place (which we broke in *Outlaws*) and there was later a 'no mistreatment of Jar-Jar' policy." Yet sometimes the policies weren't as clear cut as the creators of the games initially thought.

"I think we talked about Lando Calrissian as a joke at first," Kevin continued, "Like we would only do it if we could get Billy Dee Williams. Well, somebody talked to somebody and the next thing we knew he was

VISITING KYLE KATARN'S HOUSE

■ One ofen overlooked element that helped establish Kyle Katarn as a man of pathos was the fact you actually visit his father's house – something most of us can relate to.

BEING THERE WHEN THE REBEL BASE GETS ATTACKED

■ You should know the drill by now: the Empire is attacking the rebels, you have to repel them. Simple, action-packed and memorable.









FINDING AN EXTRA LIFE

■ No, really – even though *Dark Forces* was heavily influenced by *Doom*, the game still held on to the archaic system of 'too many deaths and it's game over'. Thus, extra lives came in handy.

YOUR FIRST PROPER SABER DUEL

■ You get the lightsaber and end up swinging it around willy nilly for a while, but a few levels later, your first actual challenge hits – a one-on-one duel with a dark Jedi.



» [PC] *Dark Forces II: Jedi Knight – Mysteries Of The Sith* – In this add-on you get to take control of Mara Jade, a somewhat conflicted character.

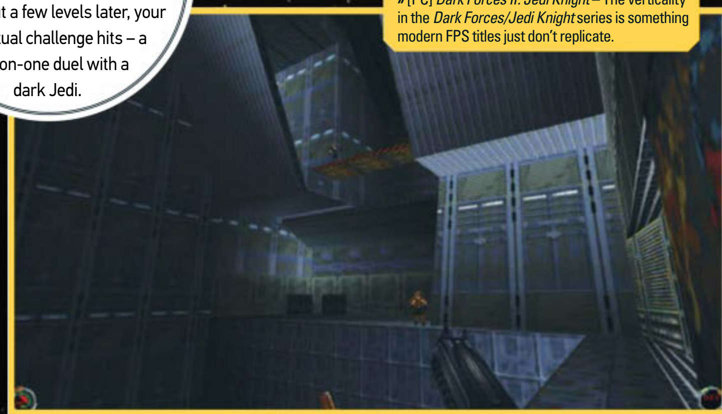
on board so we went ahead and made him a key plot point."

But it wasn't always as easy as getting Lando on board, with restrictions and rules in place and a constant back and forth between the development team and licensing. Stephen Shaw, project leader and designer on *Mysteries Of The Sith* explained one particular hurdle that has stuck with him: "The largest restriction that was put on us was that we weren't able to create any new Sith lords for our protagonist to battle. This made it a challenge to figure out how to have lightsaber battles as a game element."

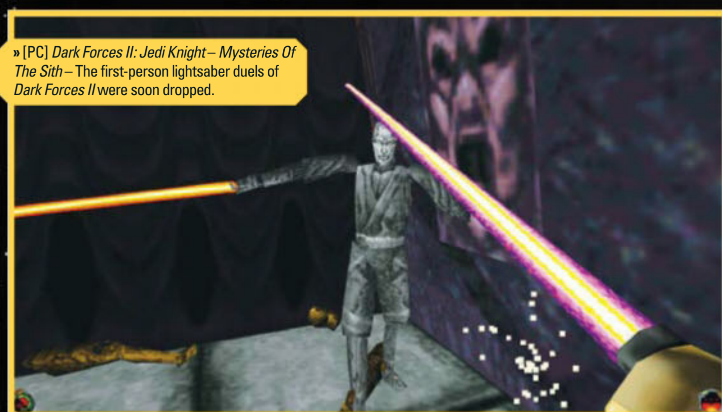
But, as Kevin pointed out, the team found a way around this particular roadblock: "We had originally proposed some sort of Sith Apprentice, a non-Jedi wielding a lightsaber. Licensing came back and said 'No, only Jedi can wield sabers'," he said, "We went back to the drawing board and spent a few days trying to work around this limitation. Nothing was coming up. Then we got this crazy idea… It seemed as though Licensing rejected at least one thing from each of our submissions, almost as if they had to veto at least one thing from our designs to validate their existence.

"We figured if we put something in our design proposal so out-of-this-world crazy, and then slipped in the real idea we wanted, they would veto the crazy thing and let our real idea through. I can't remember what it was that we slipped in for them to veto, but if they let Sith undead in, it must have been crazy. This became our MO from there on out when dealing with Licensing."

This was an iron grip holding on to the *Star Wars* licence – and with good cause. As one developer, who asked to remain anonymous, told us, the control was exercised because these were games ▶



» [PC] *Dark Forces II: Jedi Knight* – The verticality in the *Dark Forces/Jedi Knight* series is something modern FPS titles just don't replicate.

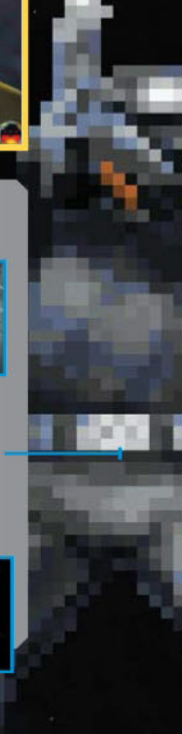


» [PC] *Dark Forces II: Jedi Knight – Mysteries Of The Sith* – The first-person lightsaber duels of *Dark Forces II* were soon dropped.

ADVENTURE TIME

How the series fits into the film universe









GETTING THE FORCE BACK

■ *Jedi Outcast* begins with Kyle Katarn having sworn off the Force. But soon enough he has to go back to his hokey old religion – and we let out a sigh of relief.



KYLE RETURNING IN JEDI ACADEMY

■ *Jedi Academy* is the first game where you don't play as Kyle Katarn. So when the bearded one shows up to give the player a helping hand, smiles the world around will have been broad.



TAKING OUT YOUR FIRST ENEMY JEDI

■ In *Jedi Academy* you find yourself fighting many Jedi. Though they're not actual, properly trained knights it's still a tense situation every time you see one.



SNIPING A RODIAN FOR THE FIRST TIME

■ Rodians in *Jedi Academy* are frustration incarnate, sniping you repeatedly from a distance – so when you turn the tables… Oh, it feels *so good*.

> **"The original Raven Jedi Knight prototype used the Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force codebase"**
> Anonymous

recognised for a certain earning potential: "The development of the game was supposed to be 100% top-secret," they said, "It was internally announced in a Raven company meeting when a mysterious towel-shrouded head was produced… underneath which was a bust of Darth Vader. The game also got an alias, *CHC*, to be used in any emails in case security was breached. *CHC* stood for '*Cold Hard Cash*'."

This ethos extended beyond just the *Dark Forces* and *Jedi Knight* series too, with Yves Borckmans, programmer on *Dark Forces II: Jedi Knight* and *Mysteries Of The Sith*, explaining it was part of the reason he eventually left the studio. "When *Episode I* was filming and we started working on games based on it the paranoia on leaks became extreme," he explained, "It became pretty uncomfortable to work there. All offices had their windows covered with opaque papers, you had to call security to go talk to some colleagues. This is about when I left, and I was happy to, it was a bad atmosphere in the name of secrecy."

But all the back-and-forth discussions, micromanagement and confusing licensing decisions in the world could not stop the core teams on each game from doing what they could do best: make some damn fine games. There is something about the *Jedi Knight* games (less so *Dark Forces*, owing to the technical limitations) that makes them feel fresh even today: clever design. Design that uses 3D space to its full advantage and design that does not just corral a player down a straightforward corridor.

You can get lost in *Jedi Knight*, you can become confused by a puzzle in *Mysteries Of The Sith*, you can get shot from someone 50 metres almost directly above you in *Jedi Outcast*, and you can have wonderful, flowing, freeform lightsaber battles in *Jedi Academy*. All of them have elements of design players would kill to see in modern shooters, but for some reason they're largely left on the junk pile.

Then, of course, the design comes back to the S*tar Wars* factor: "Some great examples of this are on level one of *Mysteries Of The Sith*," Stephen explains, "I remember describing to Kevin Schmitt wanting to see Hoth-like scenes where the wall explodes and Stormtroopers flood in and get in a fire fight with rebels and you have to run through it to accomplish your objectives.

"It was also somewhat of a funny challenge for Richard Fife who worked on the AI. Most of the AI logic and data structures had been written for *Jedi Knight* to focus on and interact with the player and it was really difficult to alter the AI's (Stormtroopers) to focus on NPC's (Rebels). Every now and then you could still see brief moments where the Stormtrooper logic tries to focus on the player before Richard's logic would smack them back into shape and they'd turn back to the NPC's."

This culture of building on what already existed didn't stop at *MOTS*, either, as our anonymous developer pointed out: "The original Raven *Jedi Knight* prototype was made in a short month, using the *Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force* codebase as a starting point. Early on, someone painted a Klingon texture white as a sub for Stormtroopers."

Even working on a project as huge as one for *Star Wars*, there were budget – and time – constraints to take heed of. But as Stephen explained, this need for thriftiness just led to creative solutions: "While we had a limited budget and production schedule, the team rallied to see how many characters we could put into the game," he said, "Clint Young and Chris Hockabout were fiends at modifying models and



» [PC] *Dark Forces* – Ever wondered what it's like to shoot Imperial probe droids? Wonder no more!



» [PC] *Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast* – This battle might look like its swinging in favour of the baddies… it's not.



» [PC] *Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy* – Even though the latter two games are primarily played in the third person, it is still possible to go back to good old FPS style.



FEELING THE FORCE

Project leader Daron Stinnett shares his own memories of Star Wars: Dark Forces

What did you do specifically on your entry to the *Dark Forces* saga?
I was working for a flight simulation publisher called Spectrum HoloByte when a friend of mine invited me to join him at LucasArts. So I met with LucasArts' management team and they basically said I could come to work for them and build any game I wanted. How could I say no to that? I was a big fan of id's *Wolfenstein 3D* - one of the earliest first-person shooters. So I put two and two together and proposed that I build a *Star Wars* 3D shooter. My role at LucasArts was Project Leader - which was basically team leader and lead designer. I also had a coding background so the first thing I did was to start coding and hiring up the team. We knew that lightsabers were out of the question given the technology available in 1993, so we focused on blaster combat and figuring out how to render *Star Wars* environments in 3D.



» The Force is strong with LucasArts Project Leader Darron Stinnet

What was the design ethos behind the games? The thinking going into it?
We were focused on creating a game that allowed players to explore *Star Wars* environments in 3D for the first time. We felt like *Dark Forces* was an incredible opportunity to build what we all imagined lay beyond the sets created for the movie and bring those environments, characters, and stories to life and make the player feel like they were part of discovering it. So we knew that we needed strong characters and story. And we were also very focused on creating environments that felt as real as was possible given the tools and technology that was available at the time.

Did this change at all during development?
It didn't. We started with a vision of creating a game that was a fun and compelling exploration of *Star Wars* locations and giving the player the chance to become part of the *Star Wars* story and we stuck to it. I remember when the game was nearing completion and the President of LucasArts asked me if I wanted any more time to add anything more to *Dark Forces* and I said "no". I felt like we had realized our vision for the game and I did not feel like adding anything more would make it any better.

How did it feel to be involved with a *Star Wars* title? Was it a series that you had much love for beforehand?
It was awesome! It felt like I was transported to this amazing fantasy working environment. Where outside my window ILM might be crashing and blowing up jumbo jets (this was before they did that kind of thing with CG). And our offices where literally stacked with famous props from the movies that today are in museums. We frequently had lunch at the Ranch right next to George, and we felt like we were solving problems that no one had solved before. It was a fantastic experience and one of the highlights of my career.

What was the brand like to work on? How much input did the higher-ups at Lucas have on it?
George really wanted LucasArts to create their own narratives so he was a big supporter of us creating characters, locations, and storylines that expanded the S*tar Wars* universe.

Was there anything that was 'forced' to be added or removed by the Lucas brass?
Not at all. Later when the prequels were made, LucasFilm became much more actively involved in the content of all *Star Wars* games but back then, we were given a lot of freedom.

What do you think of the series today and how it's remembered?
I'm extremely proud of what we accomplished. We built stunning new technology, created realistic yet fantastic environments, pioneered adding story, characters, and puzzle solving to the FPS genre. I'm also proud that along with *X-Wing* and *TIE Fighter*, we proved that *Star Wars* and licenced games in general could be just as compelling, if not more compelling as games created without the benefit of IP.

Do you think the JK/DF series gets enough respect for the influence it had on shooters?
I think *Dark Forces* gets the respect it deserves. Look, if we had added multiplayer *Dark Forces* would have been a mega hit that likely have dethroned *Doom* as the the game that defines the genre. At the same time, I know that had we attempted to do multiplayer, we would not have been successful at delivering the compelling single player experience that we did. So we made that choice, *Dark Forces* was still a great success, and I wouldn't change a thing if I could do it over again.

Finally, if Disney was to decide to bring back *Dark Forces*, would you consider sending in your résumé?
I have my own company now and we are really excited to be creating the world's first RTS online battle arena style game called *Victory Command* (www.victory-command.com). So I am very focused on making *Victory* into my next big hit at the moment. That said, I would be thrilled to work with the *Star Wars* licence again. I think *Star Wars* is at its best when it is delivering on the core fantasy and exploring technologies and gameplay that is cutting edge and I'd jump at the opportunity to do it again.



» [PC] *Dark Forces*: He may have an axe but he's no match for a blaster in the face. We bet he's wishing he never transferred from Jabba's palace.





CATCHING UP WITH KYLE KATARN AKA JASON COURT

Dark Forces sequel featured real actors. Here's the main who portrayed the main hero

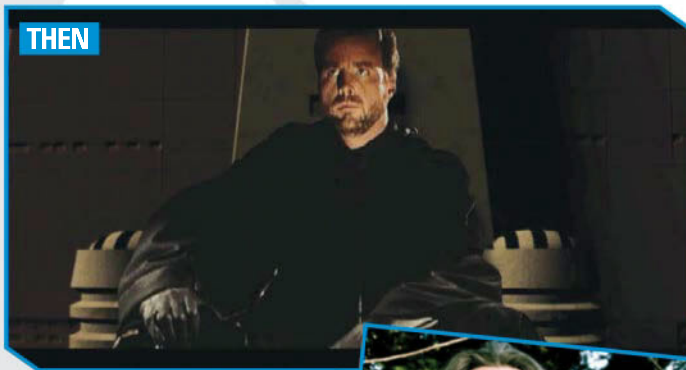
How was your experience playing Kyle Katarn in *Dark Forces II*?
I have to tell you, the experience was truly a challenge from an acting perspective. I suppose one of the hardest things to realise while watching the cutscenes is that, from the acting side, I was literally pretending to interact with things that didn't even exist. All the CG stuff was being created as we shot the scenes, so, Kyle was literally talking and interacting to light stands, green screen walls, a stack of green boxes… any object that could represent the character he was interacting with. Even the lightsaber was just the prop saber handle with a green painted broom stick sticking out of it, and waving that thing around was not so easy to whip around and make to look as weightless as weightless light…

Were you much of a gamer?
Prior to *JKDFII*, the only real games I had played start to finish were things like *Myst*, *Riven*, *Joe's Apartment*… things like that, that were much more simple, wiping screens, and much less immersive and involved.

We're going to assume you do still get recognised by those who were obsessed with *DFII*…
This is for sure one of those really cool things about having participated in this project. It is so flattering and cool to get the kind of letters and requests that I do. I hear some really cool stuff from folks who played the game and enjoyed it to the point of it actually being a highlight from their childhood. Nothing can be wrong with being told "you were a great influence when I was a kid". As an actor, there is no better. I still seem to get things sent to me fairly regularly to sign and send back, and usually they come with incredibly kind notes and letters. That's just cool, period!

What's it like now, to know you're one of the few people to have ever played the role of a named Jedi on-screen in such a well-loved franchise?
Come on! Just to be able to say you have a Wookieepedia page is something that kind of separates you from the acting masses. Totally humbling and awesome, and really cool to know that I was a part of something that was so new, creative and awesome!

Is it still something you bring up at all, say at a dinner party or in other company? Or is it something you leave in the past?
It's pretty simple: there really aren't any segues in conversation that lead to me talking about it much.



THEN



NOW

The only time it comes up is if someone else brings it up for some silly reason, but otherwise, it's just a part of my cool past.

If Disney wanted Kyle Katarn in *Episode VII/ VIII/ IX*, would you send in your resume?
Of course! Actually, I would like to hope they would ask if I wanted to audition. I'm guessing they probably wouldn't, but since I was the guy who originally portrayed him, it would be nice to think they might make that effort to offer me the opportunity to audition. I'd be all in for sure. The older, wiser Kyle is a different person now…

How is life these days? And do you use your Force powers at all?
I have slowed my role a lot over the last few years. I have switched gears and took on the quest of learning how to make wine. I have been up in Northern California making wine and running my business for Evidence Wines for the better part of 12 years now. Cooking, eating and living have been the quest for me these days, and *yes*, the Force is always with me and it is there ready if I ever need to draw from it…

painting them with new textures and suddenly we would have a Hammerhead, a Trandoshan, or a Weequay that we could have to spice up environment. I also was able to grab one of the models created for the *X-Wing* series and convert them into a format that Clint could then clean up and import into the game, giving us even more to add to the environment.

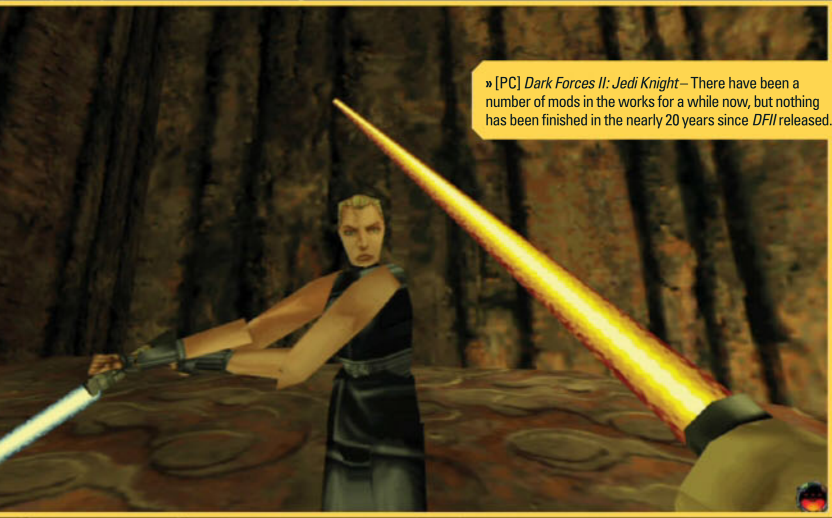
"This gave us the ability to not only have them in Katrassi, but also to have the space battles between capital ships going on outside the windows on the Talon Karrde / Holocron / Pirate Raiders levels, once again attempting to give the player the feeling that they were in the middle of one of the space battles from the movies."

One area where creative design could run wild, though, was in the use of Force powers. Introduced in *Dark Forces II*, players were suddenly able to run, jump, pull, push, grip, and electrocute with the best (and worst) of them. Far from just being a mere superpower button, though, these Force powers meant that the games could be designed in a different manner to other, traditional first-person shooters.

"Force powers opened up a whole new avenue," Kevin said, "We could place things in hard to reach places, add new dynamics to a boss battle and more. It added great campaign replay value; choosing a path and picking your powers, not to mention adding some new and sneaky dynamics to multiplayer."



» [PC] *Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy* – Deflecting bullets is only going to get you so far. It's time to use the force.


» [PC] *Dark Forces II: Jedi Knight* – There have been a number of mods in the works for a while now, but nothing has been finished in the nearly 20 years since *DFII* released.

The multiplayer, of course, was – and still is – a huge battleground for fans of the series. Those lightsaber duels in *Jedi Outcast* and *Jedi Academy* have yet to be bettered, and at least one of the finest examples of games writing out there has been based directly on one of these very duels. The admiration for them is shared by the people who actually had a hand in making them, too. "I remember vividly some very intense one on one lightsaber matches, staring my opponent down, talking some serious trash talk, and then charging them with my fingers on the Force Choke button," Kevin tells us.



"We had some epic battles in production. *Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast*'s multiplayer even took that to new heights. That is still some of the most intense multiplayer combat I have ever experienced. There is just something more personal about fighting up close with a lightsaber."

Speaking of the personal element, players of the *Dark Forces*/*Jedi Knight* series have something of a personal connection thanks to the one man who appears in all of the games – Kyle Katarn. Created for the original *Dark Forces*, Katarn went on to appear in comics, novels, even action figure form – and he's a popular character in the *Star Wars* universe. Not bad for a first-person vessel for the player.

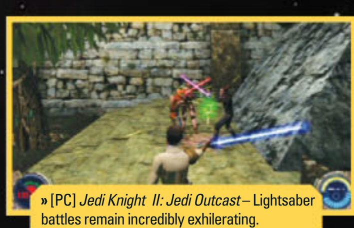
"I think Kyle Katarn was mostly designed to mirror the 'become a Jedi' hero journey of Luke but without using any of the canon characters in a game," Yves explained, "I think the overarching goal of all the games was to immerse the player in the *Star Wars* universe as the hero of the story."

But with that heroism comes temptation – both of the light side, and of allowing the player to dabble in the dark side. *Dark Forces II* allowed the player to choose their path, light or dark, with a set of powers accompanying their choices (you don't see Obi Wan Kenobi doing a Force Choke, for example). But that choice meant continuity was an issue in the following games, and this element of choice was dropped for a Katarn who was… somewhat torn.

"We wanted to avoid the same issue we had with *Jedi Knight* when the player chose their path," Kevin explained, "Since we had Kyle go to the dark side in *Mysteries Of The Sith*, we decided he would therefore have all powers available to him. I think the players liked this as well, they could choose their favourite abilities without actually locking into a side."

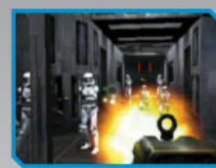
With all the juggling of elements – a game design that had to appeal and be familiar to players, an established universe that was to be handled with due care, attention and with all the problems that come with moneymaking licences, a character who had to be everything to everyone while at the same time fitting in with all manner of rules ▶


» [PC] *Dark Forces II: Jedi Knight – Mysteries Of The Sith* – No, you can't shoot it. Sorry.


» [PC] *Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast* – Lightsaber battles remain incredibly exhilerating.

AIN'T NO MATCH FOR A GOOD BLASTER

The best weapons you can use. "Fire when ready"


DL-44 HEAVY BLASTER PISTOL
■ It is not often you will choose to use the gun in slot one of your weapons, but when it happens to be *Han freakin' Solo's gun*, you tend to use it a lot.

IMPERIAL REPEATER RIFLE
■ "How can we put a machine gun in *Star Wars*?" "What if we just do it, but call it a repeater and have it fire energy balls of bullets?" "POMOTE THAT MAN!"

E-11 BLASTER RIFLE
■ The best thing about using the Stormtrooper rifle against Stormtroopers is the incredible sense of irony, especially when you're actually accurate with it.

> "I think the overarching goal of all the games was to immerse the player in the Star Wars universe as the hero"
> Yves Borckmans

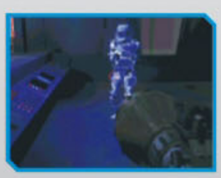




LIGHTSABER
■ Sometimes it's a bit clunky, sometimes you feel like you're not in complete control of it, sometimes the buzzing gets annoyng… but all in all this is one of the best weapons in any game, ever.

THERMAL DETONATOR
■ The enemies who use these against you are annoying, so when you get to lob your own grenades back at them it is as satisfying as sniping a Rodian.

WOOKIEE BOWCASTER
■ It did not fire like this in the films, but what the hey, maybe it originally was *meant* to charge up to fire a spread of five green star-shaped laser bolts…




DEMP 2 GUN
■ Granted, it's not the most useful gun in the game, but it is the best for when you want to make people go all electrified like this and you haven't unlocked Force Lightening ability yet.

FORCE LIGHTENING
■ Technically it's not a gun, but when you're talking offensive capabilities in the *Jedi Knight* games, nothing is better than zapping Imperials with pure energy.





» [PC] Sadly, the Stormtroopers in the *Jedi Knight* games are a lot better at shooting than they are in the original trilogy. Sorry about that Kyle…

set up by a man who wasn't even working on the game – even with all of this working against them, the *Dark Forces* and *Jedi Knight* games worked. They worked well. And they're remembered fondly.

"It comes up every once in a while and I'm definitely proud to have worked on it," Matthew tells us. "I think there are definitely some iconic moments in those first two games I worked on – the one that probably comes up most often is the falling ship level designed by Jacob Stephens. It was a good example of the right people coming together at the right time on the right project."

Kevin feels similarly, though he admitted he doesn't hear the games referenced directly so much as it is a *feeling* from those he encounters. "I think we had a greater impact *inside* the industry," he said, "Many – and I mean many – fellow developers I talk to reference playing the series. Much like the *Star Wars* films got people into making movies, the *Dark Forces*/*Jedi Knight* series got them into making games.

"One of the most common comments I hear among artists is the amazing look at feel of Nar Shaddaa in the series. It was one of the first environments that made people feel vertigo in a game; it was so expansive and complex."

Even those with memories of a nine-month 'brutal' crunch period on *Dark Forces II*, like Yves, still have a sincere soft spot for the franchise. "Everyone kept insane hours," he explained. "My typical day would be 9-10am til 6-7pm, work over provided lunch, go home, eat something, see my wife for an hour, go back to work around 9pm and work until 3am. Our technical director literally bought Coke by the palette and dumped it in the office along with a mountain of snacks. To give you an idea, if I remember well there were over 20,000 bugs reported in the bugs database for *Jedi Knight* and we fixed almost all of them."

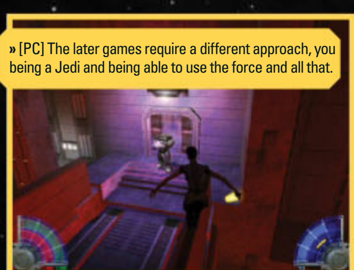
Yet even after that seeming horror story, Yves still wasn't down about his time on the series: "Anyone in the entertainment/gaming industry around my age knows it and remembers it. Every time I meet someone new and we exchange stories, *Jedi Knight* is *the* game they all always remember and it's always good memories."

> **"I was actually at LucasArts when they were shut down by Disney working on 1313 as lead designer"**
> Matthew Tateishi

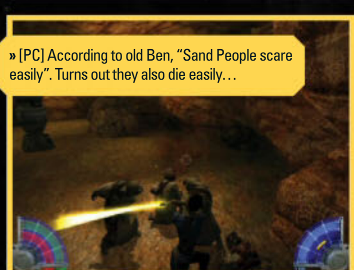
LucasArts was still working on *Star Wars* properties late in the day, forging ahead with experiences even when the studio seemed to be coming apart at the seams. "I was actually at LucasArts when they were shut down by Disney working on 1313 as the lead level designer," Matthew said, "I think this would have definitely been one of the best *Star Wars* games in a long time." But it wasn't to be – that era is over.

There will be more *Star Wars* games, of course, as Yves – currently a Disney employee – pointed out: "I can't of course say anything specific, but Disney has *big* plans for *Star Wars*," but those wanting to see a return from Kyle Katarn and co will likely be left wanting: "Though I doubt any would go back to the *Dark Forces* era or characters."

So maybe it's a good thing, then, that the *Dark Forces*/*Jedi Knight* series went away. It floated off on a high, never to be brought crashing back down to earth like so many other franchises that were milked within an inch of their life – and we can name quite a few of those. We are unlikely to see a new adventure, but when the older ones still hold up compared to some modern games – even upstaging them in some respects – it's less of a bitter pill to swallow. ★



» [PC] The later games require a different approach, you being a Jedi and being able to use the force and all that.



» [PC] According to old Ben, "Sand People scare easily". Turns out they also die easily…



» [PC] Unsurprisingly, the last *Jedi Knight* game is the best looking in the series. It still holds up pretty well today, thanks to some decent mod support.

ROGUE GALLERY

The heroes and villains of the Star Wars: Jedi Knight universe

ALLIANCE NEUTRAL EMPIRE



(NOT QUITE) C3PO

■ You see this protocol droid popping up all over the place in a few of the *Jedi Knight* games, and every time you're expecting him to break out into a cry of "we're doomed!" or to blame bad luck on a trashcan-alike compadre. Instead you get a voice that isn't delightfully camp… this isn't the droid you're looking for.



GAMORREAN GUARDS

■ The pig-faced ones make an appearance in all of the *Dark Forces*/*Jedi Knight* titles, and with good cause: they're easy to dislike, making them ideal enemies. Admittedly it is a bit off-putting to hear them squeal when you take them out, but remember these are the guys who bullied C3PO.



GONK ROBOT

■ So called because it waddles around going "gonk… gonk… gonk…" a lot, the gonk robot is seen various places throughout the series of games. What does it do? We're left in the dark on that one. Does it get in the way? Yes. Is it hostile? Nope. Can you shoot it anyway? Absolutely yes. And we would recommend that you do so!



AT-AT

■ No, you can't grapple up to its undercarriage, slice it open, lob in a thermal detonator and detach before watching the thing explode spectacularly. It would be fair to expect a grand battle scene against an AT-AT, but it never does come. You can, however, run around underneath it without fear of it treading on your head.



TRAINING DROID

■ This nippy little blighter might have stung Luke Skywalker's backside once or twice in *A New Hope*, but it's no match for hot lasers in the face, as you find in *Dark Forces*. Being the very first enemy you encounter in the game, the training droid is memorable for literally no other reason. In fact, they barely show up after this.



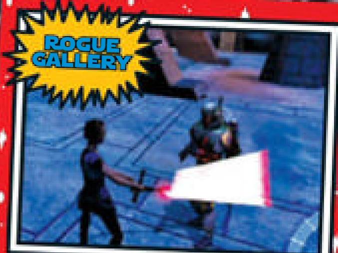
LUKE SKYWALKER

■ Luke pops up, allowing us to see what he ended up doing after the events of the original trilogy of films (we're in a pre-*Episode VII* world here, folks). Basically he spent his years living in a temple, wearing the same clothes as in *Return Of The Jedi* and trying his very best to be more like Yoda with each passing day.



LANDO CALRISSIAN

■ Rescuing the most traitorous of all the space rogues from prison, players get the pleasure of Lando Calrissian's company for a while in Jedi Outcast. Voiced by the *actual* Lando, Billy Dee Williams, this was a fanboy's dream when the game first game out. And to be perfectly honest, it's still pretty cool these days.



BOBA FETT

■ Boba Fett turns up in *Jedi Academy*, providing the player with a combination of both one of the best characters appearing in the game while at the same time being one of the most annoying fights in any game ever made, ever. A man with quick-fire lasers, a jetpack and a flamethrower does not a fun enemy make.



RANCOR

■ Big, angry and – in the case of *Jedi Academy*'s Rancor – modified to be bigger and angrier. Just as you get to the point where you're comfortable leaping about, lobbing your saber and waltzing through any challenge put in front of you, the game ups the ante with an enemy that can easily pick you up and eat you.



DARK TROOPERS

■ Think Stormtroopers, but with the ability to actually shoot straight, and you're pretty much on the right path. Oh, also they're about nine feet tall and carry some formidable weaponry. Basically they are what would happen if Stormtrooper cadets actually listened when they went to Stormtrooper school.

SUPER MEAT BOY



Old-school platform games were often incredibly tough, but not always for the right reasons. This is how a pair of plucky programmers took all the best bits of yesteryear's games to make a modern classic

■ DEVELOPER: TEAM MEAT ■ SYSTEM: PC ■ GENRE: ACTION

2D platformers are a go-to for indie developers, largely because of the simplicity of the format. Basic as they are, though, it's easy to look at classic examples from gaming's past and just assume that replicating them would be easy – you only have to look the number of platformers on iOS and the freeware scene that range from dire to passable to see that isn't the case. Precision is key, as is understanding what it is about platform games that makes them enjoyable.

Having grown up with the likes of *Mario*, *Metroid* and *Castlevania*, the two-man Team Meat was fairly well-placed when it came to turning its proof-of-concept browser-based hardcore platformer *Meat Boy* into a full release, and they always knew they wanted it to retain the challenge seen in so many games that predate even their own Nintendo education. "I think we went into it to make a game referencing retro videogames and those games were notoriously difficult," says Edmund McMillen, the chap behind the art and design of *Super Meat Boy*, as well as numerous individual projects separate from Team Meat including *The Binding Of Isaac* and a selection of smaller releases available on Steam through *The Basement Collection*. "We were going in that direction from the beginning."

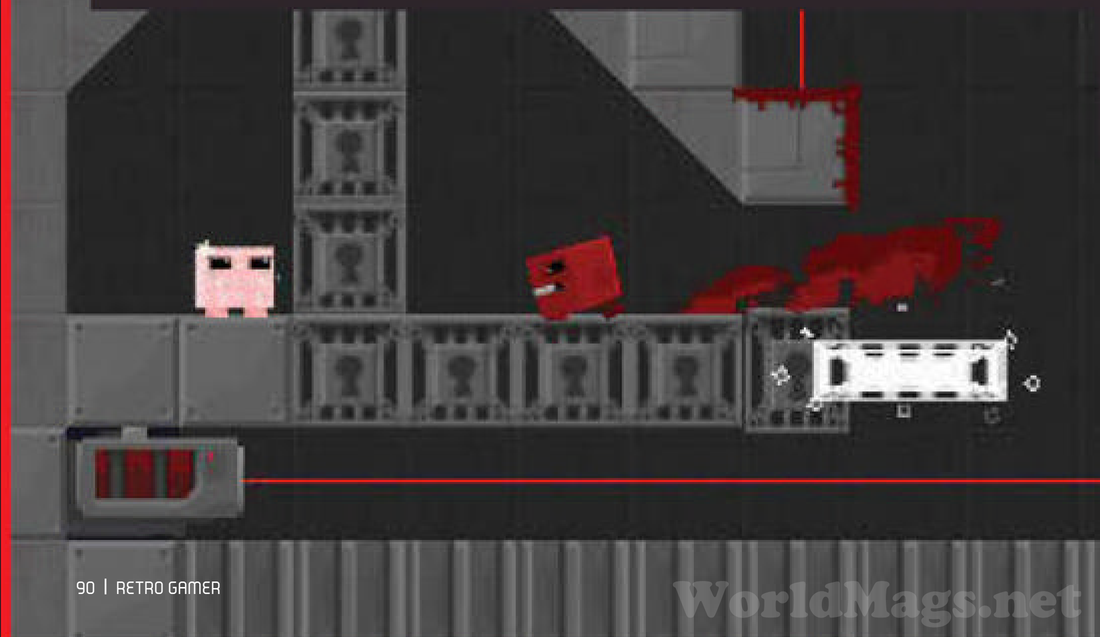
But the goal wasn't just to make a hard game, rather one to take the difficulty of classic platformers and make it relevant and rewarding to a modern audience. "That was the whole goal when designing it – let's think outside the box here. The environment has changed – the rules have changed," explains Edmund. "Videogames have changed drastically over the years and I think the reason why *Mario* and *Ghosts 'N' Goblins* and all those games were so difficult back then and that their design was more frustrating than difficult was that all those people had previously developed for back then was arcade. And that's all about getting as many quarters as you can from the player, so the penalty was really high – that's how you made money. Coming out of the arcade generation to the home console, the difficulty came through but frustration factor grew immensely – you couldn't just pump more quarters in to get more credits. With *Meat Boy*, we designed around the way things had changed. We took the penalty down to zero but kept the difficulty really high. In fact, we could push the difficulty much higher because of that reduced penalty and frustration."

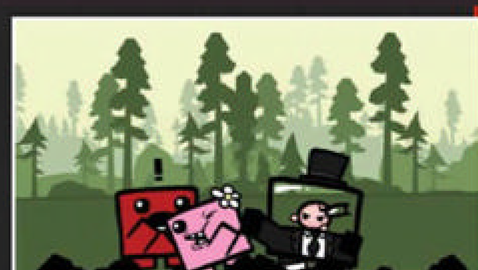
Each bite-size stage in *Super Meat Boy* can typically be finished in seconds, with failure forcing an instant restart – one brief burst of skill is all it takes to get you through the expertly-crafted levels, and a slip onto some spikes or misjudged jump can't erase past successes, only demand a whole new set. But as well structured and designed as their game may be, Edmund (with his experience in random generation thanks to *The Binding Of Isaac*) and Tommy both reference *Spelunky* as a example of how traditional level design might not even be the best way to do things any more.

"I think random generation is the new arcade formula for games – a new way to get people constantly replaying but instead of playing for the high score, they're playing for the enjoyment factor of the new experience every time," Edmund tells us. "I wouldn't say it's the future of games but I would say that it's a good... I don't know if it's a genre or what but it's a new design architecture that you can design games around and just make them endless, like an arcade experience." ★

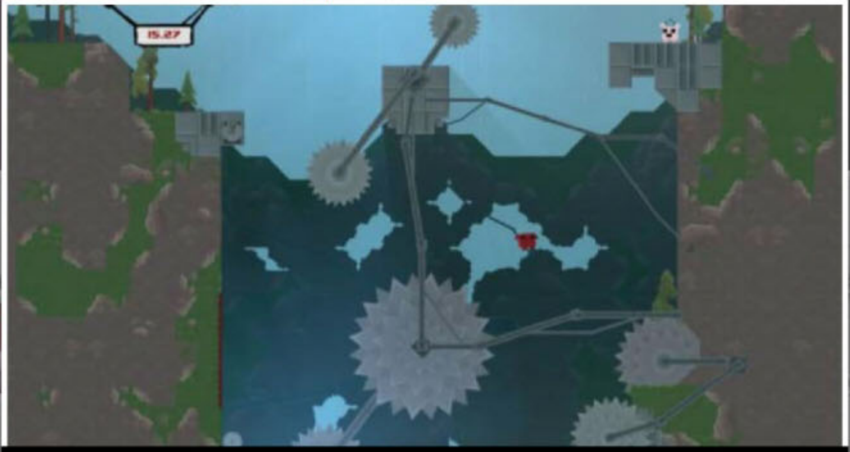
INFLUENCES
The games that inspired Super Meat Boy...

SUPER MARIO BROS.
STRIDER
MORTAL KOMBAT





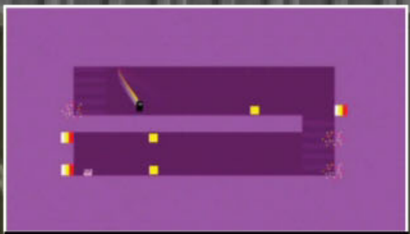
» [PC] Each world opens with a short sequence riffing on a classic opening scene, from *Street Fighter II* to *Castlevania*.



» [PC] Huge spiked gears are perhaps the most common hazard in the game. They never get any less terrifying, either.



» [PC] Having the game play all your runs was inspired by a popular *Super Mario World* ROM hack.



» [PC] All kinds of guest characters from modern indie classics feature as unlockable characters.

THE TEAM

The people that made Super Meat Boy happen

TOMMY REFENES
CODING

EDMUND MCMILLEN
ART/DESIGN

> “Coming out of the arcade generation to the home console generation, the difficulty came through but frustration factor grew immensely”

Edmund McMillen laments how many retro platformers failed to evolve in the leap from arcades to consoles

THE TEAM ON SUPER MEAT BOY



DARRAN JONES

■ I'm a huge fan of tightly designed platformers and the SNES, so *Super Meat Boy* has always appealed to me. It's certainly frustrating in places, but never so much that you can't make progress. Everyone should play it.



NICK THORPE

■ Unfortunately I've still yet to play *Super Meat Boy* but I've heard nothing but good things about it. I'll admit to being a fan of its distinctive sprite work, which calls to mind some of the classic SNES platformers.



JONATHAN WELLS

■ A great looking game with plenty of nods to the old games we love. I'm a big fan of this game and having seen *Indie Game: The Movie* I have a better understanding of the blood, sweat and tears that went into it.



DAVID CROOKES

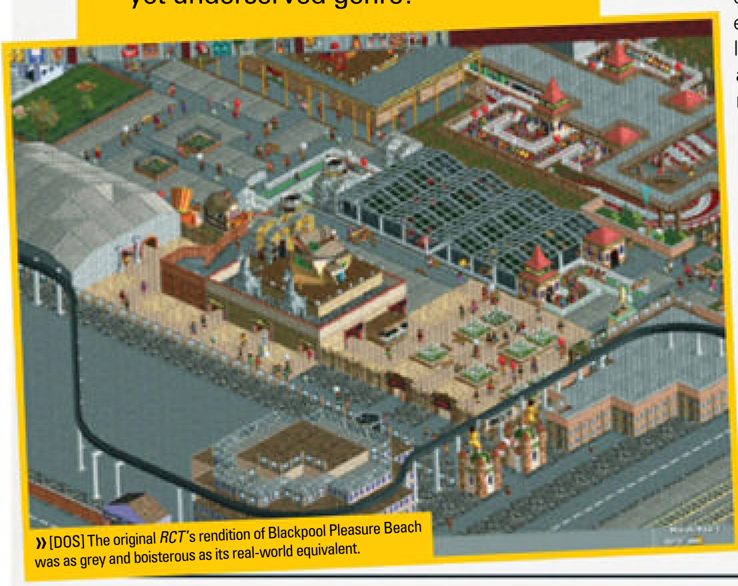
■ *Super Meat Boy* is like one of those super difficult 2D platformers that underpinned the games industry in the Eighties. This thumb torture approach to gaming shouldn't be refreshing but it is and I love it.

In the chair with...

CHRIS SAWYER

As an iconic name for most PC gamers, Chris Sawyer and his Tycoon games paved the way for a new era of simulation games. As Transport Tycoon celebrates its twentieth birthday, Adam Barnes caught up with Chris to learn more about the reserved developer and his career

It's surprising, really, to consider how important the name Chris Sawyer is to so many gamers when he's responsible for just a handful of games. Whether it's the cheerful tooting of a steam train or the tick-tick-tick of a carriage slowly climbing that first peak of a roller coaster, Chris's games maintain a very special place in the hearts of gamers around the world. And yet the humble developer always favoured a more solitary approach to game creation, working almost entirely alone on his projects and avoiding the limelight of the media as much as possible. Even to this day his games remain hugely compelling, and it's not hard to see why. Twenty years on *Transport Tycoon* still maintains the same depth it once had, and hasn't been beaten yet. With an excellent port of the original PC classic now on mobile devices, is Chris helping to revive a much-loved yet underserved genre?



» [DOS] The original *RCT*'s rendition of Blackpool Pleasure Beach was as grey and boisterous as its real-world equivalent.

Hi Chris, how did you first get into programming and making videogames?

I started programming while still at school in the early Eighties, and programming fascinated me – I loved the logic of it and the thrill of designing the sequence of instructions to do simple things on the screen. I started with BASIC on the school's Commodore Pet 2001 and RML 380Z computers, and then dabbled in a little machine code on the Pet's 6502 processor – not easy as it meant working out the machine code instructions in binary and then 'poking' them byte by byte into memory using a BASIC program. Most of these programming sessions resulted in games of some form or another, very simple games but satisfyingly fun to play, and great for showing off to my friends. Eventually I bought my own computer, though an odd choice – I bought a Camputers Lynx while all my friends had the usual ZX Spectrums and VIC-20s.

What was it that you enjoyed so much about programming, and did you ever see it as a potential future for yourself?

My interest and fascination just grew and grew – I loved programming and the challenge of trying to get the best out of these flawed and underpowered early home computers, and the thrill of creating your own little games. I had no idea that I'd end up with a career in computer games; I was still at high school at this time and programming was just a hobby. I remember my chemistry teacher pulling me aside one day and showing me a newspaper cutting, a young lad had written a game on the ZX81 and made over £1000 from it – I was in awe, but never thought I'd ever be that successful writing games. I think at that age I had no idea what I'd end up doing.

How did you end up developing games for a living, then?

Things started developing a bit more on the games front after I started at university while studying a degree in Computer Science And Microprocessor Systems. I still had no ambition to make a career from games but during this period in the mid-Eighties, I had some of my Memotech MTX games published by Memotech themselves which was very satisfying, and I even made a small amount of money from them, enough to buy my first printer and a floppy disc drive I think. Eventually the Memotech gave way to an Amstrad CPC6128, and during my final year at university I bought an Amstrad PC1512 which was the start of a very long relationship with PC programming.

What were some of your first games like? What sorts of games did you enjoy making?

I did all sorts of games on the Memotech and Amstrad computers in the Eighties, probably not much that was actually original – I'd often see pictures of arcade games in magazines and be inspired to create something similar on my own computer. Some of the last games I did on those early home computers were isometric viewpoint games and they were very challenging to program on such simple machines with limited graphics and memory and power, but very satisfying when you got it working. The isometric viewpoint became a fascination for me – and 30 years later it's still my favourite display format for a game.

You became quite well known for your isometric games, what is it about the viewpoint that appealed to you?

I think it's the 'conciseness' of the isometric viewpoint I like – it shows three dimensions but remains very consistent in the way it shows depth as things don't get smaller in the distance like projected 3D. I think it holds many advantages – it limits the amount of detail the game has to show as the viewer can never get closer than a certain distance to any object, which means everything you see in the game appears to be consistently detailed. With projected 3D you either need to keep adding more detail as you get closer, or you end up with bland objects when viewed close up. I had experience with projected 3D back in the early days and even played around with projecting textures onto 3D polygons (this was long before hardware accelerated graphic cards so I actually wrote algorithms to draw the projected textures pixel-by-pixel in machine code), but I always seemed to come back to the isometric viewpoint for my own games as it suited the style and type of game so much.



> “I loved programming and the challenge of trying to get the best out of these flawed and underpowered early home computers” Chris Sawyer



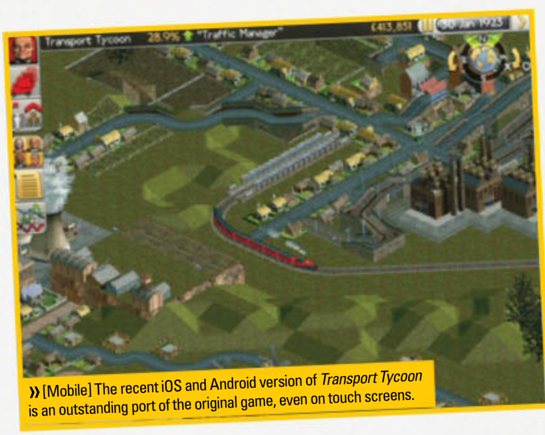
» [DOS] Chris Sawyer's original build might've lacked the iconic visuals, but it certainly shows that familiar gameplay.

So how did you end up getting into paid game development?
I ended up doing DOS conversions as a bit of a stop-gap after I graduated from university – I'd been offered a job working full-time for Ariolasoft but this fell through at the last moment just before I graduated and there was no chance of getting a 'serious' job in the electronics industry as I'd missed all the application deadlines. So I got in touch with a business agent I'd heard of, Jacqui Lyons at Marjacq Micro, who represented many of the well-known UK programmers back in those days, and she set me up with my first DOS conversion – a contract to convert the Amiga/Atari ST game *StarRay* to the PC.

How did you find the conversion work?
I thrived on the work – it was challenging trying to get the PC to do anything like the same quality of graphics as the Amiga back then, but my knowledge of machine code meant I could get every last ounce out of the processor. I think the most well-thumbed book on my desk was the one which listed timings for every 8086 processor instruction as I was always trying to optimise every last byte of code to gain a little speed. *StarRay* had wonderful smooth-scrolling multi-colour graphics and sprites on the Amiga – on the basic PC it had 4-colour graphics which were rather less than smooth as they clunked across the screen, but it was good enough, and if you were lucky enough to have one of the super-duper new '286' PCs which had just been launched then *StarRay* looked fantastic with its VGA graphics and enough power to (just about) smoothly scroll. Many more DOS conversions followed – games like *Virus*, *Conqueror*, *Birds Of Prey*, *Elite Plus*, *Xenomorph*, *Dino Dini's Goal*, and *Frontier: Elite II*. I enjoyed the work and it paid well, though I became very frustrated that often I was unable to finish my contract because I'd caught up with the original game's programmer and had to wait for him before I could convert the remainder of the game. My solution was to take on two conversions at the same time – I did the PC conversions of *Dino Dini's Goal* and *Frontier: Elite II* in parallel, which worked quite well.

SELECTED TIMELINE

GAMES
- **STARRAY** [DOS] 1988
- **XENOMORPH** [DOS] 1990
- **ELITE PLUS** [DOS] 1991
- **BIRDS OF PREY** [DOS] 1992
- **FRONTIER: ELITE II** [DOS] 1993
- **DINO DINI'S GOAL** [DOS] 1993
- **TRANSPORT TYCOON** [DOS] 1994
- **TRANSPORT TYCOON DELUXE** [DOS] 1995
- **FRONTIER: FIRST ENCOUNTERS** [DOS] 1995
- **ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON** [DOS] 1999
- **ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2** [PC] 2002
- **CHRIS SAWYER'S LOCOMOTION** [PC] 2004



» [Mobile] The recent iOS and Android version of *Transport Tycoon* is an outstanding port of the original game, even on touch screens.

It sounds like you were quite gifted at optimisation, then. Where there any specific challenges you encountered?
Every game had its own set of challenges but I think the speed of updating the display was usually the main challenge for every conversion. Unlike the Amiga the PC had no hardware to help with updating the screen so it was all down to me to use every trick I could find in order to plot the individual pixels fast enough. I spent a lot of time writing bits of code using macros – which is a way to repeat a sequence of instructions with minor variations – instead of loops, as it avoided the extra processor cycles of jumping back to the start of a loop again. It resulted in quite a lot of machine code just for plotting objects on the screen but it was necessary to get enough speed.

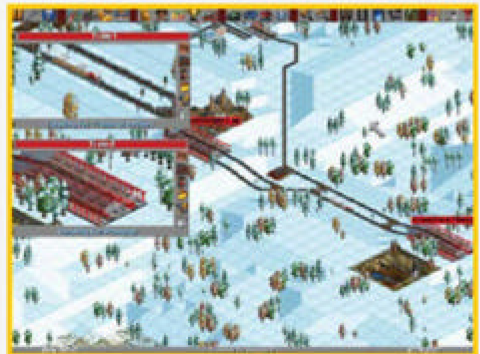
How did you come to work on your first game?
I think it harks back to my fascination with isometric viewpoint graphics again. I started to tinker with creating an isometric display system on the PC in my spare time while still doing the conversion work. I think I even started creating a little platform-type isometric game, just to test the isometric system.



» [DOS] Founding your own company, naming it, picking your face and colour all helped make *Transport Tycoon* feel a little more personable than *SimCity*.



» [DOS] There were a handful of created scenarios to deal with, but for many the randomly generated sandbox levels were the crux of the game.



» [DOS] MicroProse suggested that Chris and Simon (Foster, artist on *Transport Tycoon*) designed additional themes to create extra longevity.

Things just sort of grew from there I think – I would work on the conversions enough to keep up with the development of the original games, and then in my spare time I would play around with assembler-code algorithms and ideas.

And this led to *Transport Tycoon*. What was the inspiration for the game?
I was fascinated with Sid Meier's *Railroad Tycoon* game – I played it for hours and hours, it was definitely my favourite game at the time. The viewpoint was just an overhead 2D map though, and I wondered whether my favourite isometric viewpoint would be better, and if other modes of transport should be included – I was inspired. The only other PC game I remember playing a lot around that time was Geoff Crammond's *Formula One Grand Prix*, and to this day I have still to find another driving game I enjoy as much as I remember enjoying that one.

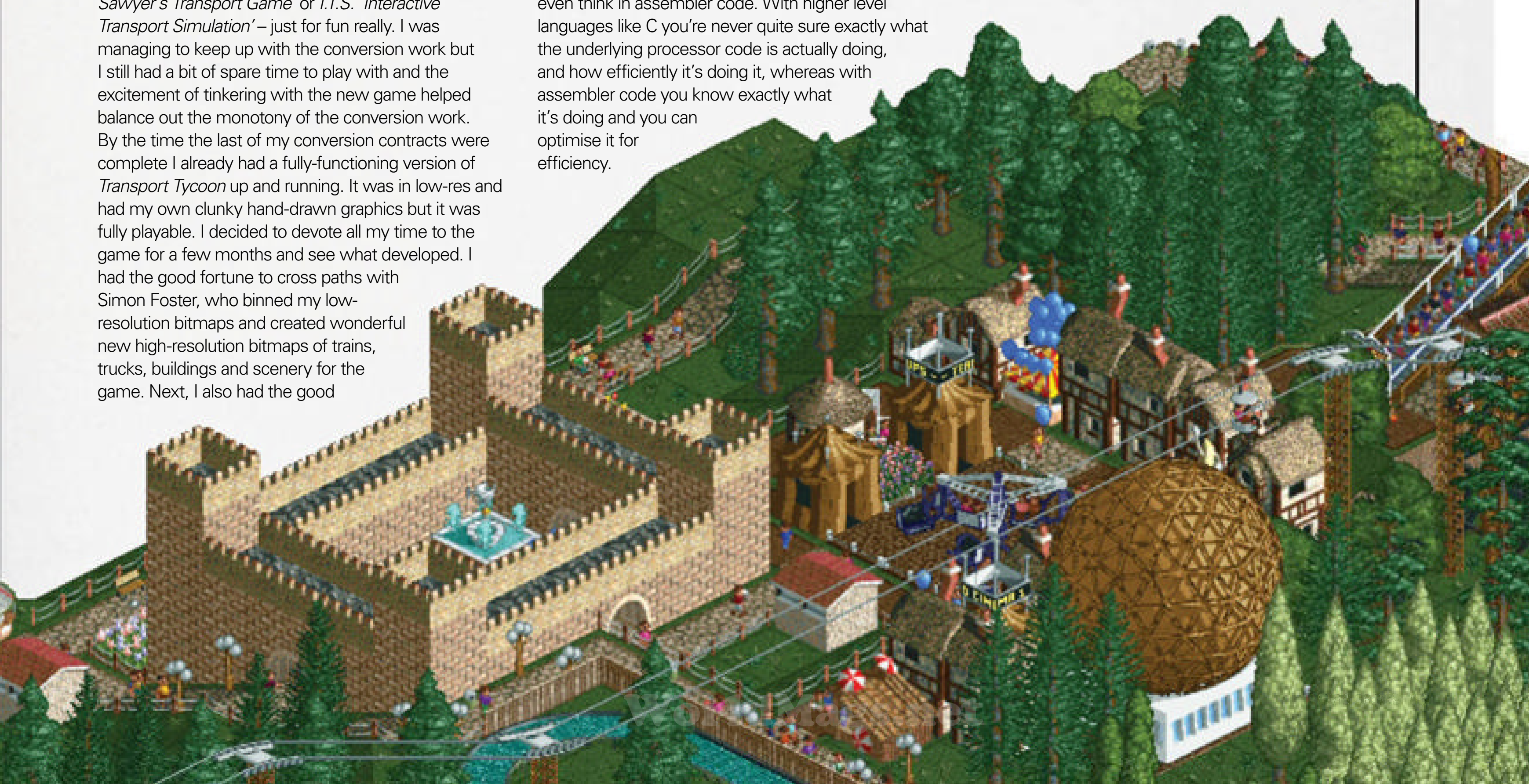
What was the process of development for the game like? Did you encounter any problems?
I started creating *Transport Tycoon* – aka '*Chris Sawyer's Transport Game*' or *I.T.S. 'Interactive Transport Simulation'* – just for fun really. I was managing to keep up with the conversion work but I still had a bit of spare time to play with and the excitement of tinkering with the new game helped balance out the monotony of the conversion work. By the time the last of my conversion contracts were complete I already had a fully-functioning version of *Transport Tycoon* up and running. It was in low-res and had my own clunky hand-drawn graphics but it was fully playable. I decided to devote all my time to the game for a few months and see what developed. I had the good fortune to cross paths with Simon Foster, who binned my low-resolution bitmaps and created wonderful new high-resolution bitmaps of trains, trucks, buildings and scenery for the game. Next, I also had the good fortune of being at exactly the right time in the PC's development, which meant that processor speeds and graphics handling were improving enough for my game to be able to handle high-res graphics and sound. Within a few months I had a ninety per cent complete game, which we then showed to Microprose, and the rest as they say, is history.

> "In my spare time I would play around with assembler-code algorithms" Chris Sawyer

You famously worked with x86 assembly language even as it was becoming more common to use the C programming language. What was it that appealed so much to you?
I love the directness and logic of it. I grew up programming in assembler code and probably now even think in assembler code. With higher level languages like C you're never quite sure exactly what the underlying processor code is actually doing, and how efficiently it's doing it, whereas with assembler code you know exactly what it's doing and you can optimise it for efficiency.

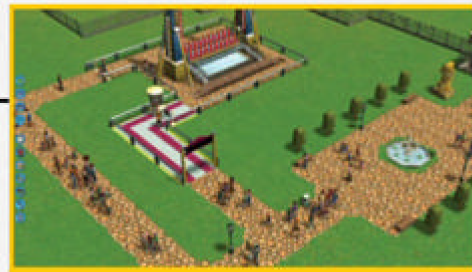
Back in the old days you needed that efficiency to be able to do anything decent on home computers – you had to optimise every single instruction and ensure every item of data was stored in the least amount of memory possible, and I became used to working that way. Both *Transport Tycoon* and *RollerCoaster Tycoon* on the PC were entirely programmed in x86 assembler code. I still enjoy programming in assembler code much more than high level languages – C just frustrates me!

Do you think working in assembly language made *Transport Tycoon* and *RollerCoaster Tycoon* better games?
I've no doubt it enabled a much more detailed level of complexity in the game – much of the simulation side of the game involved a lot of processor workload and needed to be highly optimised otherwise the game would have slowed down too much on even the fastest processors of that era, and achieving that same level of optimisation in a high level language would have proved impossible. The downside of writing in assembler code is that it can't be recompiled to run ▶





[PC] The sequel focused heavily on the design and decoration of your parks, but added in a ton of extra rides and roller coasters to build, too.



[PC] Chris only acted as an advisor on *RollerCoaster Tycoon 3* after deciding he had done everything he wanted to do in *RCT2*.

on another platform – something that's caused us considerable problems in the years since the original version of *Transport Tycoon* on the PC. If only someone would write a cross-compiler that could compile x86 assembler code into ARM code – that would be handy!

How did you come to work with Microprose?
I had the game probably ninety per cent complete before it was shown to anyone, and then my agent Jacqui at Marjacq showed the game to several publishers. We actually got very close to signing the game to another publisher and then Microprose enticed me down to Chipping Sodbury to visit their offices and meet their staff, and that swung it for me – I felt that they were the right company to publish the game.

Was there much input from MicroProse?
I think they did suggest some changes but few made it into the game – either it wasn't possible to do what they wanted or I was too stubborn! I had quite a clear idea of what the game was, and how to ensure the gameplay worked the best it could, so I wasn't easily swayed off course. I did put in their suggested references to other Microprose games though – *Submarine*, *UFO*, and a few other hidden things – nothing which affected gameplay, just visual effects.

After releasing *Transport Tycoon Deluxe* you then went on to make *RollerCoaster Tycoon*; was that something you had planned to do?
Once *Transport Tycoon Deluxe* was finished I actually signed a deal to create *Transport Tycoon 2*, and worked on it on and off for nearly a year I think before eventually losing interest. I think at the time I was also struggling a bit with adapting to Windows/DirectX development after years of developing under DOS. *Transport Tycoon 2* actually got to the stage of having vehicles moving around, albeit without any decent graphics – I had re-written the isometric game world system to handle multiple levels of bridges and tunnels as this was something I felt that would make *Transport Tycoon* a much more three-dimensional game, allowing elevated railways and maybe even underground systems. I got to the point where I felt I couldn't carry on with the game though, I was struggling for inspiration as it felt like the game wasn't going to be much of an advance on *Transport Tycoon Deluxe*.

What inspired you to make RollerCoaster Tycoon instead then?
During the time I was struggling with *Transport Tycoon 2* I started developing an interest in roller coasters – I had never much liked riding them while I was young but now I was becoming interested in their engineering, their design, their visual architectural qualities, and gradually I was beginning to enjoy riding them as well. I bought every book I could find on roller coasters and I joined both the Roller Coaster Club Of Great Britain and the European Coaster Club. I visited places like Blackpool Pleasure Beach and Lightwater Valley just to ride the roller coasters. While watching the vehicles moving around on multi-level bridges in *Transport Tycoon 2* I started to wonder what it would be like if those vehicles were roller coasters – would it be fun to build three-dimensional little roller coasters that would intertwine with each other in an isometric game world? I wasn't really getting anywhere with *Transport Tycoon 2* at the time anyway, so I put the game on hold and I started adapting the code I had already written and within a month or two I had some basic roller coasters going in the game.

> "Either it wasn't possible to do what they wanted, or I was too stubborn!" Chris Sawyer

So it was more of a passion project than a particular drive for a commercial idea?
I had some interesting conversations with a few people in the games industry around this time, mentioning that I was thinking of doing a game where the focus was to build roller coasters, and all the advice was that it would only ever be a niche game, would never make any money, and I'd be much better off sticking to *Transport Tycoon*! I never was very good at listening to advice though, so I made a few decisions – I bought myself out of the *Transport Tycoon 2* contract and effectively cancelled the project, and started working on '*Project White Knuckle*' full time, funding development myself and keeping the project under wraps as I didn't want to be distracted by people's negative opinions on the game design.

As it turns out, it was quite popular. Did you believe that it would be?
I think by the time *RollerCoaster Tycoon* was eventually published I did have a few hints that it might do reasonably well, but no idea that it would take off quite the way it did. Sales figures back then took a couple of months to come through and it really was quite a shock when we finally saw the first sets of figures and realised how much of a success the game was.

After RCT2 you returned to transport again with Locomotion – what changed for you to want to return, and why not call it *Transport Tycoon 2*?
For technical reasons we chose not to use the *Tycoon* label for *Locomotion* but it definitely felt like it was the spiritual successor to the original *Transport Tycoon* games. The *RollerCoaster Tycoon* isometric system gave me a good starting point for going back to a transport-focused game as it was now so far advanced it could cope with more detailed and smoother animation as well as the multi-level "three dimensional" transport routes I wanted to include in previous games. So things kind of went full circle – *RollerCoaster Tycoon* was developed from the ashes of the abandoned *Transport Tycoon 2* project, and now the well-honed *RollerCoaster Tycoon* game engine was then being adapted to create a new transport game.



FIVE TO PLAY

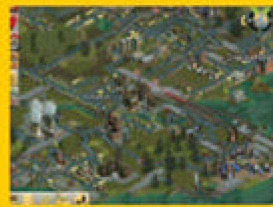
Chris Sawyer's collection is limited, but hugely important











STARRAY 1988

■ The first conversion job that Chris Sawyer had, *StarRay* looked and played essentially as you would expect a *Defender* clone to play – and its US name *Revenge Of Defender* made no allusions to its inspiration. It was a difficult job for Chris to replicate the smooth scrolling visuals of the Amiga version on the PC's then inferior hardware but his knowledge and experience with machine code meant he was able to replicate the visuals handily. It never really made headway in the DOS era, however.

TRANSPORT TYCOON DELUXE 1995

■ The complete version of *TTD* came with improved signals – for complex train systems – as well as a world editor to build and make your own scenarios. The randomly generated terrain, however, meant that it was possible to play for hours trying to perfect your transport systems and maximise profit. Chris admits that the game focused trains rather than the core four transport systems, and truthfully that tended to be how it was played.

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2 2002

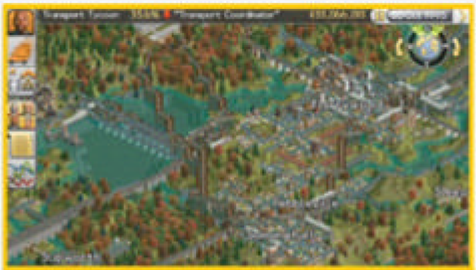
■ Though in many ways the same game as its predecessor, *RCT2* brought in a heap of additions that not only made the game more rich but added in a wide range of roller coaster types. It was – even in Chris's mind – the ultimate version of the game. Every type of coaster – new or old – was accounted for, giving players untold freedom to build exactly what they wanted. The ability to share your coaster creations was an added boon thanks to the game's popularity.

CHRIS SAWYER'S LOCOMOTION 2004

■ By utilising a similar construction engine as *RollerCoaster Tycoon* and newer, more powerful machines made this the most complete version of *Transport Tycoon* – even if it wasn't named as such. It wasn't as well received as *Transport Tycoon*, though, with most complaints surrounding the UI, but a heap of improvements made for a solid addition to the concept all the same. It's a similar engine that powers the recent *Transport Tycoon* mobile release.

TRANSPORT TYCOON 2013

■ This was the first project that Chris worked on were he wasn't the sole programmer, but alongside his understanding of isometric design and uncanny programming skills the team at Origin8 were able to create a fantastic port of the original using *Locomotion*'s graphics, *RollerCoaster Tycoon*'s construction and the same simulation depth as *Transport Tycoon*. Recommended, if you're a fan of mobile retro games.



» [Mobile] The recent mobile has proven to be extremely popular, with excellent touch controls that make it effortless to play.



» [PC] Though *RollerCoaster Tycoon 3* maintained a lot core similarities to the series, it didn't capture the masses quite as much, both commercially and creatively.

Your name was known for simulation games; is that why it was attached to *Locomotion*?

I would have preferred just *Locomotion* as the game's name but due to possible legal issues with using the name on its own like that we were advised to prefix it with my name, which also suited the PR people as they felt it might make it easier to promote the game having my name prominently displayed.

You chose not to be a large part of *RollerCoaster Tycoon 3*'s development, why was this?

When I licensed the rights for the next version of *RollerCoaster Tycoon* to Atari I also made the decision to be very much hands-off for the new game – I completed my vision with *RCT2* and felt it needed someone else to take the game any further. I saw development builds while Frontier were creating *RCT3* and it was exciting to see how the game developed but I didn't have any creative input into the game.

You stopped making games around this point too, why was this?

I didn't have much enthusiasm for continuing in the industry at that time – the style of games was moving away from what really interested me, and a long-running dispute with the publisher was making it very difficult to focus on anything game-related, or indeed to feel any kind of positivity towards the games industry.

Were there any challenges in bringing *Transport Tycoon* to mobile?

One of the biggest challenges for the team was trying to get the mobile device's display system to cope with the style of graphics the game needed – for all the power and functionality of the graphics chips on modern hardware it's very difficult to persuade it to do something it wasn't designed to do, like pixel-mapped graphics rather than polygons or sprites. Another big challenge was how to make the game completely playable with only touches and gestures – especially difficult on a tiny mobile phone screen – while still keeping the depth and complexity of the game.

Do you think we will ever see *Transport Tycoon* return to PC?

There are no plans for this at the moment as we're completely focussed on mobile platforms but I wouldn't rule it out completely.





RETROREVIVAL

Cloud Master

FLYING EVER HIGHER

» **MASTER SYSTEM » HOT-B » 1989**

Growing up with the Master System could be a strange experience at times. On one hand, the system's sustained European success saw some decidedly Western games arrive on the system via third party publishers – the likes of *Fantastic Dizzy, Robocop Versus The Terminator,* and *Sensible Soccer* were typical of the console's Nineties line-up. On the other hand, the lack of third-party releases in the system's early years meant that some very Japanese games were selected for international release. Sega's low budget back then meant that a lot of them received very little localisation, which sometimes resulted in releases that didn't make a whole lot of sense when viewed through the eyes of a young British kid.

Cloud Master definitely falls into the category of 'very Japanese games'. This slightly tough conversion of Taito's arcade shoot-'em-up is standard fare for the genre, but the Eastern influence shows up heavily in the game's visual design. *Cloud Master*'s characters and setting are loosely drawn from the classical Chinese novel *Journey To The West* – a monkey-like character riding a cloud, the presence of pig enemies and the ancient Chinese setting all point to this origin, but that's knowledge I acquired as an adult. As a kid, this didn't make a lick of sense. I just resigned myself to the fact that sometimes I played as Robocop and needed to blow up the Terminator, and other times I played as the cloud-riding Michael Chen, shooting at bowls of noodles and floating tiger heads. Such was life as a Master System owner. *

RETRORATED



>> The massively hyped Retron 5 is finally here, but is it any good? Darran and Nick put it through its paces and also look at the latest games including Resident Evil HD and Duke Nukem: Megaton Edition

Retron 5

CAN HYPERKIN'S NEW CLONE CONSOLE LIVE UP TO ALL THE HYPE?

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** RETRON 5
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £129.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** HYPERKIN
- » **DEVELOPER:** HYPERKIN
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

BRIEF HISTORY

» Hyperkin is a relatively new company, having been founded by two brothers in 2007. It initially sold *Dance Dance Revolution* dance mats, but began branching out into different peripherals. It still supplies peripherals for classic systems like the Dreamcast and NES, but also produces the Retron range.



» You have to push the Power button quite hard to turn it on and off, which is a bit of a pain.



» There's pad support for the SNES, NES and Mega Drive.

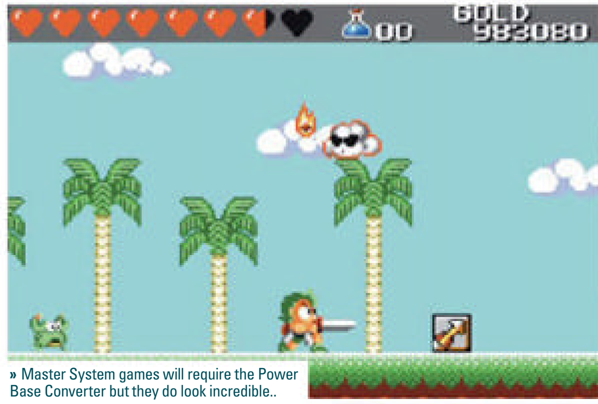


Hype and controversy have gone hand-in-hand with Hyperkin's new machine. Questions about it allegedly using certain emulators without permission; its production delays; compatibility issues and a far higher pricepoint than what was first promised have all followed the machine since it was originally announced in 2013. This is a review though, so lets focus on what the console does and doesn't do.

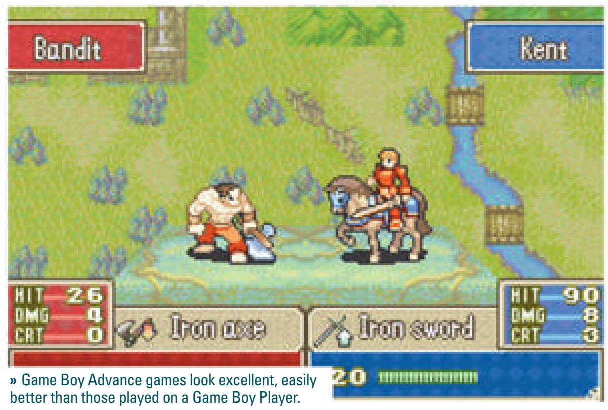
One thing we need to make clear is that the Retron 5 will not replace your existing consoles. It can't due to compatibility problems with certain games and its incompatibility with add-ons like the 32X, Mega CD and lightguns. If you're short on space, however, and only have a modern TV you should definitely consider it.

It's not an easy machine to love, though, due to its Frankenstein-like build. It's hard on the eyes, delivering rather unflattering curves that are awkwardly married to space-age sleekness. We can forgive this though, as the device's five cartridge slots and six joystick ports meant it was never going to be beautiful. The machine is durable and feels well made. We noticed that the cartridge slot for the SNES games was a little stiff with certain US cartridges, but other than that we've personally had no issues with adding or removing games. It's worth noting that because the machine effectively dumps the cartridges contents upon loading only one slot can be used at a time. It's certainly not a deal breaker, but it's a pity you can't have your favourite games at the ready and simply switch between them.

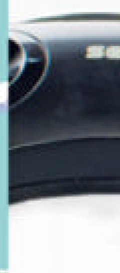
While the hardware is solid, the hideous gamepad that comes supplied with the device is, quite frankly, poor. The device is horrible to use and makes many of the games quite awkward to play. The buttons also feel flimsy and cheap and we'd be greatly concerned if it was the only pad we had access to. While it's functional and will do in a pinch if you're



» Master System games will require the Power Base Converter but they do look incredible..



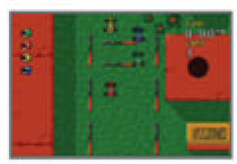
» Game Boy Advance games look excellent, easily better than those played on a Game Boy Player.







» The control pad isn't the best and should be used only in a pinch.

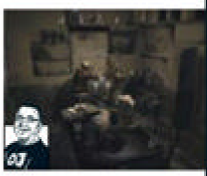


» Sadly, you can't use Micro Machines' extra cartridge ports.



» The pad works much better as a handy wireless remote.

✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Resident Evil HD
A very good update that makes the classic GameCube remake feel surprisingly fresh.



NICK
Resident Evil HD
Yes it has been remade several times, but this is easily the best. More so if you have a modern TV.



lacking pads, it's certainly not worth the £35 (the additional cost for getting a machine with two pads) asking price and is best used as a remote to access the console's menus.

And you'll certainly want to check those menus out as a lot of cool tinkering can be done on them. Screenshots can be saved, buttons can be remapped and it's even possible to use controllers on different systems (we recommend SNES and 6-button Mega Drive pads for this). While there are settings that apply to every console, there are also game specific options that allow you to change everything from the screen colours on the Game Boy to adding game patches or copying Retron 5 saves to the original cartridge. These two last points are rather interesting. While the patches can let you play hacks and apply English language patches on Japanese games, it also opens up the door to piracy, something we obviously don't condone. Interestingly, ROMs of some of the incompatible Mega Drive and NES games do work perfectly, but the incompatible SNES games do not.

An SD card is used for updating firmware, and is also used for loading any patches or homebrew ROMS you might want to use. The ability to add Retron 5 saves to your original cartridge is another nice touch, but we found it hit and miss. Of the games we tried, five saved perfectly, but two failed, wiping the data, meaning you may want to hold off using it on your precious RPGs.

Some of the biggest interest in the Retron 5 has been with its HDMI-based output. We're delighted to say that it's excellent and is definitely a key selling point of the console. There's a large selection of filters that can be supplied, but they are rarely needed, as the base output is so good. As much as we love our old consoles they look extremely poor on large modern TVs. Play on a Retron 5, however, and the image is pin-sharp. What's more you can add scanlines to create that authentic CRT experience, stretch the screen and even zoom the image (although we prefer the standard settings). The picture clarity is superb and is a world away from the washed out look of the Retron 3. Yes you'll get, potentially better results with an upscaler, but one like the XRGB-Mini Framemeister will cost around £200 and won't solve space issues either.

"While the hardware is solid, the hideous gamepad is quite poor"

There's no denying that the Retron 5 feels highly priced at £129.99, but it's also a solidly built machine that's incredibly versatile and delivers an exceptionally amazing image, even for Game Boy and Game Boy Advance games. It also doesn't suffer from the pin-issues that plague many NES consoles and lets you effortlessly play games from any region without worrying about switching. In short it's a great way of getting the most out of all of your old games. *

In a nutshell

Yes, it's not a true authentic experience, but if you're looking for stunning picture quality and are short on space you'd be silly to ignore Hyperkin's console.



» Game Boy and GBA games look absolutely fantastic on the Retron 5.



» Sadly, you can only use one cartridge in a slot at any one time.



» The SD Card slot is used for patches, but can also load homebrew ROMS.

RETROROUND-UP

>> Every month we look at all the classics and latest releases that are available to buy or download

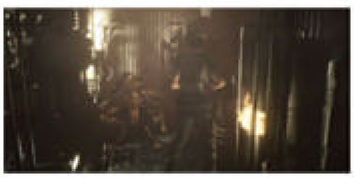
PICK OF THE MONTH

Resident Evil HD

» **System:** PS4 (tested) Xbox One, PS3, Xbox 360, PC
» **Cost:** £14.99 » **Buy it from:** Xbox Live, PSN, Steampowered.com

You've got to hand it to Capcom, it has certainly managed to get a lot of mileage out of its classic survival horror game over the last 18 years. *Resident Evil HD* marks the fifth time that the game has been made available to gamers and we are delighted to say that it is the best version of the bunch.

It's effectively the GameCube version, but it's been significantly overhauled to ensure it runs far better on today's modern systems. While many will argue that the new widescreen mode is lazy (cutscenes have been cropped from a 4:3 image and reframed) there's no denying that it does a great job of showing off the creepy Spencer Mansion. In fact there have been quite a few updates to the visuals over the GameCube release, particularly on characters and enemies, which all look improved other the already impressive GameCube renders. Certain backgrounds have also been updated, although others have been left, making the original textures quite noticeably apparent in the new 1080p resolution. Overall it is a solid looking update with plenty of new lighting effects that manages to look far more superior than the GameCube version when run on a modern TV screen.



» [PS4] Characters and enemies have been touched up, meaning they look better than their older alternatives.



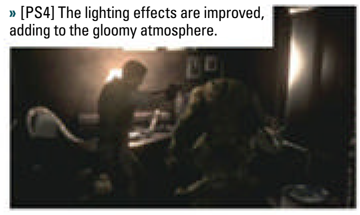
» [PS4] Barry Burton fans will be pleased to hear that he's playable in *Resident Evil: Revelations 2*.



» [PS4] The new controls make it far easier to evade enemies this time around.

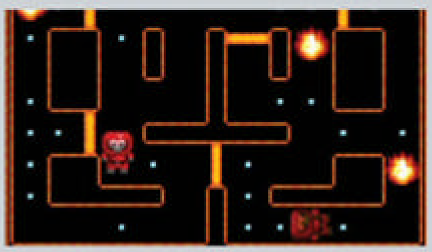
It's not just the graphics that have been enhanced in Capcom's remaster. Capcom has also completely changed the control system that the game utilises. Chris and Jill now have complete free movement, making the tank-like controls of the earlier games a thing of the past. You can select them for a more authentic experience, but we actually love the freedom it now offers you. Some have argued that it makes the game a little too easy and the fixed camera views can cause occasional problems, but seeing how tough *Resident Evil* on GameCube was, the additional ease of movement isn't a bad thing.

Gameplay wise, it's *Resident Evil*, so expect lots of puzzles, an interesting array of monsters to tackle, the odd satisfying boss fight, and some extremely effective exploration that slowly but gradually opens up the huge mansion. It is a very strong update of a classic game that is certainly worth its asking price.



» [PS4] The lighting effects are improved, adding to the gloomy atmosphere.

88%

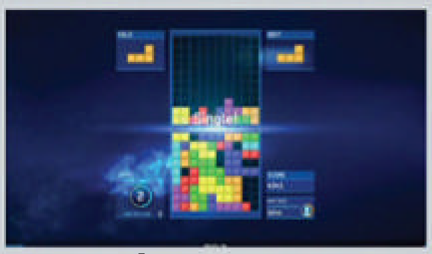


Burnin' Ranger

» **System:** iOS
» **Buy it for:** £1.49
» **Buy it from:** App Store

Bomberman crossed with *Pac-Man* sounds like a great concept, but this interesting effort from Park Productions doesn't quite work out. Conceptually it's great, with your fireman running around the single screen maze collecting water droplets to keep his temperature down. Fellow firemen need to be rescued and doors must be chopped down with the axes that occasionally appear in the corners of the maze. Clear everything and you can move onto the next stage. While the mechanics work well, *Burnin' Ranger* suffers from a number of gameplay issues. The controls aren't as tight as we'd like and the collision detection can make avoiding enemies difficult. The axe's movement is also too quick, while chopping through doors feels rather cumbersome and fiddly. A nice idea that just needs better execution.

44%

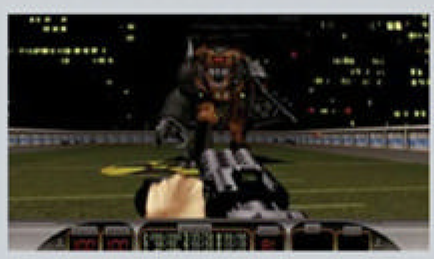


Tetris Ultimate

» **System:** Xbox One (featured), PS4, 3DS, Vita, PC
» **Buy it for:** £7.99
» **Buy it from:** PSN, Xbox Live, eShop, Steam, Retail

This is your only option for *Tetris* on the current generation of consoles right now, but we're not so sure it lives up to its title. There are some good things going on here – we like the inclusion of the Tetris Self, an AI routine which mimics the way you play, allowing friends to challenge you even while you're offline. The game allows you to toggle many advanced options such as T-spins, wall kicks and the sorting method, but unfortunately basic modes have fixed variables – if you want a timed game, you can only play for three minutes, and if you want a line limit it must be 40. *Tetris* is always good at its core, but this really bizarre oversight means we can't really recommend *Tetris Ultimate* wholeheartedly.

60%



Duke Nukem 3D: Megaton Edition

» **System:** PSVita (tested) PS3
» **Buy it for:** £7.99
» **Buy it from:** PSN

Duke Nukem 3D remains the best game in the series and it has been well presented here, with excellent dual analogue controls and a rather handy death rewind feature. This new feature is extremely useful as we've forgotten just how brutal *Duke Nukem 3D* can be on its later stages. Less impressive, however, is the multiplayer, which is simply a mess. Getting online is hit and miss and the lag is unbearable, a pity as it supports co-op play. The game itself is exactly as you'd expect from an early first-person shooter, with well-placed power-ups and some maze-like stages that require you to scour every last nook and cranny. Oh and it includes four additional expansions, making it great value for money.

72%

Welcome to Homebrew



>> Isn't it nice to see games that have been built around a programmer's love for a TV or film franchise? It might be iffy legally, but seeing people put their own slant on what they love is heart warming. That said, they have to be pretty brave as well since fans can often be harsh critics and anything they create has stand up under intense scrutiny



» [Amstrad CPC] Thanks for the trip, dad.

BY HOOK OR BY CROOK

A classic TV show is heading to your CPC

An unnamed man is seen storming into an office, yelling at the person sitting behind the desk there and slamming down what we later find out is a letter of resignation before leaving. He returns home through the streets of London in a vintage Lotus Seven unaware of the rather sinister looking black hearse and it's equally unsettling driver following, but the effects of the knockout gas pumped into his house as he packs to leave the country are far harder to miss. After a period of unconsciousness he wakes to find himself in unfamiliar surroundings… although they do look suspiciously like the picturesque tourist destination of Portmeirion in Wales.

If that sounds familiar then you've probably watched the sometimes surreal cult Sixties drama The *Prisoner* at some point because this sequence is the opening titles. The show is based in the mysterious 'Village' and its newest arrival, Number 6, is determined to discover who is in charge and, more importantly, a means of escape. But with attempts being made to break him, no knowledge of which side any of his fellow inmates are on, and the lethal Rover patrolling the boundaries, it means that getting away might be on a little more difficult.

Fans of the show should be immediately at home since the major Village landmarks like the stone boat near the beach, the giant chess board and Number 2's green-domed house are all present – we were reading all of his dialogue in Leo McKern's voice – and there are even public announcements delivered by the tannoy system from time to time. The game has been released in English for the Amstrad CPC having been translated from Spanish and there are also C64 and Spectrum versions available here: Kikstart.eu/prisoner-text.

> **"We were reading all of his dialogue in Leo McKern's voice"**

Incoming

If you want an insider tip, we'd argue that Speedmaza is worth keeping an eye on for Atari 8-bit

KIKSTART.EU/AXE-GENESIS-WIN



▲ Sega's scrolling hack and slash series get an unofficial sequel in the form of *Golden Axe Genesis*.

▼ Why not boldly go where no person has gone before with *Star Trek: The Next Generation* for the C64?



KIKSTART.EU/JUPITER-ST-TNG-C64

KIKSTART.EU/CAP-RESCUE-SPEC

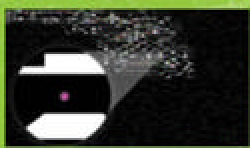


▲ Cap'n Rescue to… erm, the rescue despite being trapped inside the body of his pet monkey by a witch.

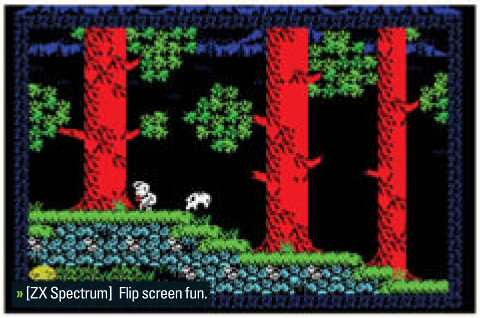
DARE TO BE DIFFERENT

Ludum Dare 31 ran for three days at the start of December with the challenge being to cram an entire game into just one screen. Some of the entries leant towards classic single-screen action while others like *Scramble Slug* – reviewed this issue – and the web-based release *Rainbow Maze* crammed what would have been lots of screens into a single play area; the latter includes a magnifier to make it less harsh on the eyes!

It total there were 2,635 entries created over the extended weekend with over 1,300 competing and covering a wide range of genres. Kikstart.eu/ludum-dare-31.



»[Windows] Little and large.



» [ZX Spectrum] Flip screen fun.

A SHOT IN THE DARK

On the last day of June 1908, *something* came tumbling through the Earth's atmosphere and smashed into the ground. 30 years later and an expedition to the crash site has uncovered something remarkable, an artefact made from an unknown material which scientists can only assume is alien. Enter a archaeology student who must take this item and, through a series of flip screen adventures, solve the Mystery of what happened in 1908. Kikstart.eu/mystery-spec goes to the World Of Spectrum forum thread about this mysterious adventure.

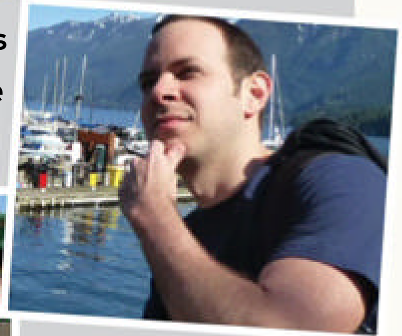
▼ Become a wriggling worm that's on the run from an airborne predator in *Birdfood* for the Atari 8-bit.



KIKSTART.EU/BIRDFOOD-A8

Homebrew heroes

Developer Merso X created Power Rangers: Beats Of Power, the beat-'em-up based on the original Mighty Morphing Power Rangers and some of the games spun off from that franchise. We morphed and sat down for a friendly chat

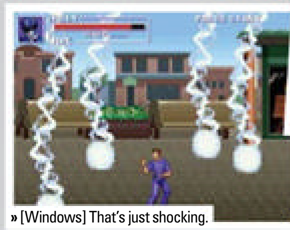


Where did the idea for *Power Rangers: Beats Of Power* actually come from?

It comes (not surprisingly) from being a fan of old-school beat-'em up games – especially multiplayer ones. And as well done and fun as the original *Power Rangers* from the 16-bit era are, they could be improved in some ways. *MMPR The Movie* for the SNES allowed for multiplayer action but didn't let players move around freely in the Z plane. It was an original idea that presented a fresh and new gameplay mechanic, but at the end of the day it's hard not to see it as a limitation. The Genesis version I always felt wasn't as dynamic as it could have been compared with say the classic *TMNT Turtles In Time*. And with that kickass *Power Rangers* theme song, you need dynamic gameplay!

How difficult was it to create the game?

It was pretty much my first game. The biggest challenge was the morphing sequence. Luckily, users at the Chronocrash forums helped me out with either checking/fixing scripts or pointing me in the right direction.



» [Windows] That's just shocking.

What inspiration did you take from existing 16-bit *Power Rangers* games?

Pretty much all of it! The main inspirations from the SNES games are the colourful graphics and the ability to play as un-morphed Rangers. From *MMPR The Movie* for the Genesis I took most of the sprites as I feel they are very show accurate.

Have you had feedback from Power Rangers fans?

The response has been very positive for the most part. Some of the most hardcore Rangers fans feel that the game should have included more characters from the series.

Is there anything you'd have done differently?

Absolutely, higher quality music and sound effects and better attack detection for the bosses. Not contacting people from the show for help (they didn't like it). The technical stuff can still be modified but the truth is that I am very happy and proud of the way the game is now. I would rather work on something else than go back to *Beats Of Power*, I spent so much time on that game.

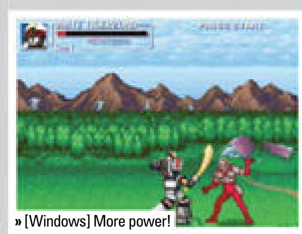
And finally, do you have any future plans?

Right now I am working of a *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* fan game based on their 8-bit NES outing. The name is *TMNT: Rescue Palooza!* It has the simpler gameplay mechanics of the NES *TMNT* games, and a ridiculously high number of selectable characters, some of them being animated from scratch (as opposed to using sprites from a different game as a base). Well not from scratch really as I am basing their animation on stills from the Fred Wolf cartoon, but it requires a lot of redrawing and recovering. This project will take a long time to complete but I'm in no hurry.

I am also planning a completely original game but there's really nothing to announce at the moment. Man, if I had all the time in the world I would tackle so many projects. If I were to do another *Power Rangers* game I would definitely base it on *Zeo*.



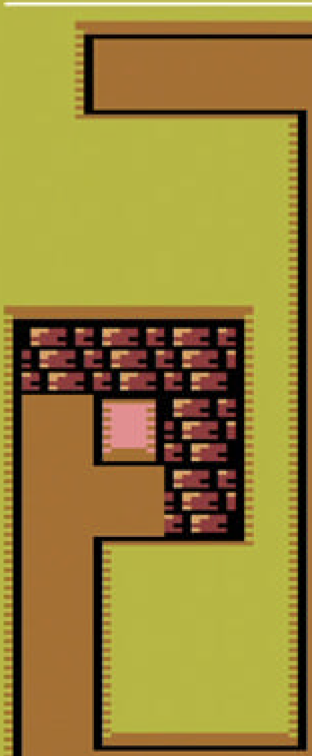
» [Windows] It's morphing time!



» [Windows] More power!

XPLODE MAN

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE PLUS/4 » **DEVELOPER:** ASSASSINS » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/XPLODE-264 » **PRICE:** FREE



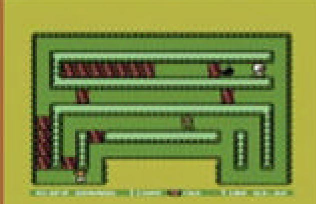
Xplode Man **is** yet another entry in a long line of cute characters who bear a passing resemblance to Lego spacemen that find themselves under attack and, in order to survive, must resort to placing explosive charges. Blasting attackers into tiny pieces might be satisfying but it's easier said than done, because the bombs that the titular character leaves behind have timers on them and will kill anything within their blast radius. Speaking of which, blowing up the walls will occasionally leave behind power-ups which can be collected in order to increase the range of destruction, add to how many bombs the player can actually use simultaneously, and speed up the player motion for dashes away from something about to go boom.

Up until this point it does sound and indeed look like a straight clone of Hudson Soft's classic *Bomberman* and that alone would be noteworthy since this is the first real example of the genre on the Plus/4, but the developers have made a few tweaks so it isn't identical to the game that inspired it. Most notably, the action isn't quite as fast-paced when compared to other 8-bit offerings and tends to be significantly less generous with the power-ups and that's because it instead it focuses on delivering a slower paced and slightly more cerebral single player campaign. And, rather than merely finding the exit after having destroyed all of the on-screen enemies, the task is instead to clear everything that can be exploded from the playfield.

It's always going to be a risk changing the mechanics of something well loved like *Bomberman* but, although we felt it could have done with the option of a battle mode for some frantic multi-player action, the most important elements of the game that inspired *Xplode Man* are there and wrapped in some very accomplished presentation, including one of the jolliest in-game tunes we've heard on a homebrew title this year. And of course it'll never stop being enjoyable to see two enemies blown to bits by just one well placed bomb.



» [Plus/4] Things that make you go boom.



» [Plus/4] And… run away!

93%

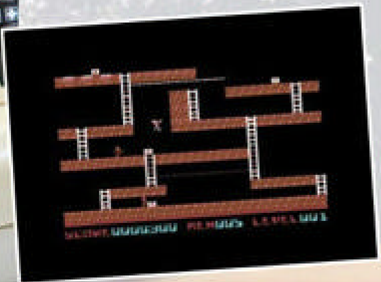
> "The important elements of the game that inspired Xplode Man are there and wrapped in very accomplished presentation"

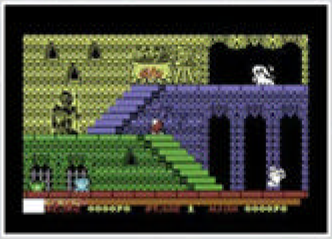
Make this

Every month our very own Jason Kelk will be teaching you handy new programming techniques. This month: Jumping

NEW

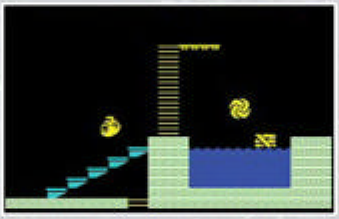
1 The phrase 'make the object jump' is a simple one on paper, but actually making something that works in a game can be quite tricky. Some platform games don't actually have jumping, like *Lode Runner* where falling from a platform leaves the little man descending at a fixed speed.

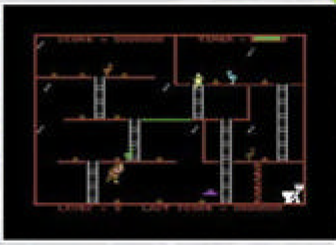




2 *Olli And Lissa* on the C64 has a jump mechanic but it's quite unusual because the sprite moves upwards and then downwards at a constant rate, which results in a less than natural-looking movement when holding the joystick left or right.

3 The most common method is to follow an arc like *Egghead 5* on the Spectrum, either using a pre-defined table or by having a vertical speed that starts as negative – making the object move upwards – and is added to over time to decelerate and then accelerate downwards.





4 Finally, an example of how not to do things is *Manky* on the C64; the sprite immediately shifts to the highest point when the jump starts, leaving it to drift down. It appears to be walking down an invisible staircase if the joystick is moved horizontally!

TANK BATTALION

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE VIC 20 » **DEVELOPER:** ADRIAN FOX
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/TANK-BAT-VIC » **PRICE:** FREE





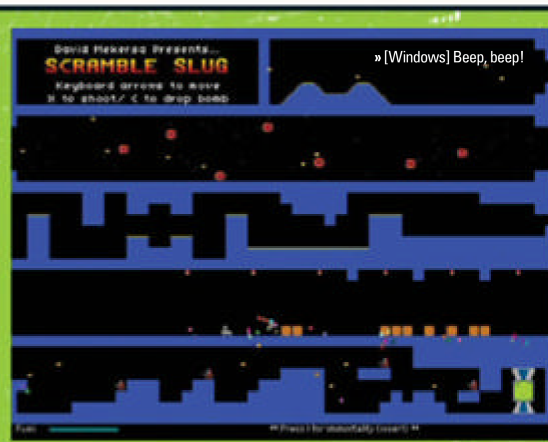
» [VIC 20] Moving quickly is advised.

Taking on a tank battalion alone might seem unwise, but that's the challenge in this game; the player controls a lone tank and must destroy everything moving on each stage to proceed.

One shell is fatal to any tank so the player's stock of three needs to be guarded zealously, but a more important target to defend is the base – represented by a flashing eagle on the screen – because losing that will immediately end the game regardless of remaining lives. The base is behind a wall that must be blasted away and it's also possible to remodel the rest of the screen in this manner as well.

There are a few technical hiccups here and there which are a bit frustrating – we have occasionally noticed bullets passing through the backs of tanks, for example – but the VIC handles things well overall and this is a solid addition to its library of arcade-inspired games.

84%



» [Windows] Beep, beep!

SCRAMBLE SLUG

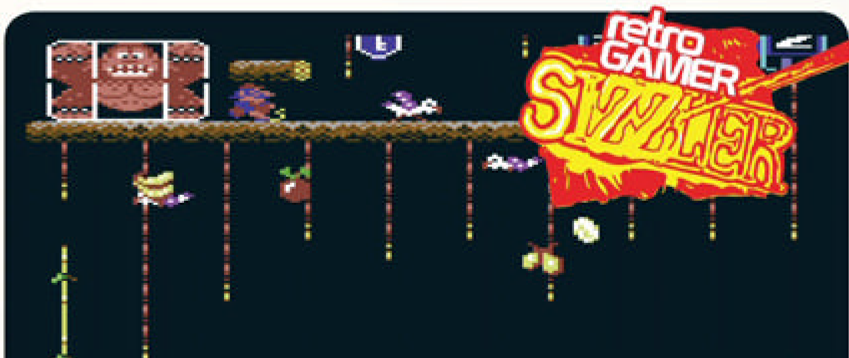
» **FORMAT:** WINDOWS » **DEVELOPER:** DAVID MEKERSA
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/SCRAMBLE-SLUG-WIN » **PRICE:** FREE

The recent instalment of online game development competition, Ludum Dare, had a theme of 'entire game on one screen' and *Scramble Slug* by David Mekersa does just that, scaling down what would probably have been around sixteen screens until they fit neatly into one window.

The player aids a brave – or depending on how you see it, foolhardy – hero as he wades into enemy territory, first flying a spacecraft and then driving a jeep before finally storming the defences of the reactor he must destroy on foot. The inspirations are, as the title might suggest, *Scramble* and *Metal Slug*.

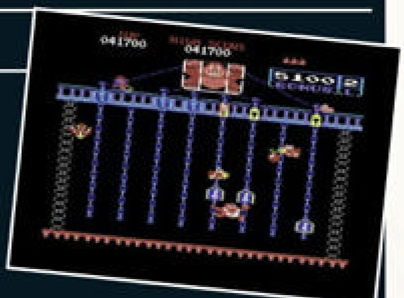
There are a few hiccups scattered throughout the game – hardly surprising considering the limits placed on development time– and, since what you see on screen is the entire mission, it is a little on the short side but we did enjoy blasting our way past the dinky graphics and looped it several times.

76%



DONKEY KONG JUNIOR

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE 64 » **DEVELOPER:** ANDREAS VARGA
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/DK-JUNIOR-C64 » **PRICE:** FREE

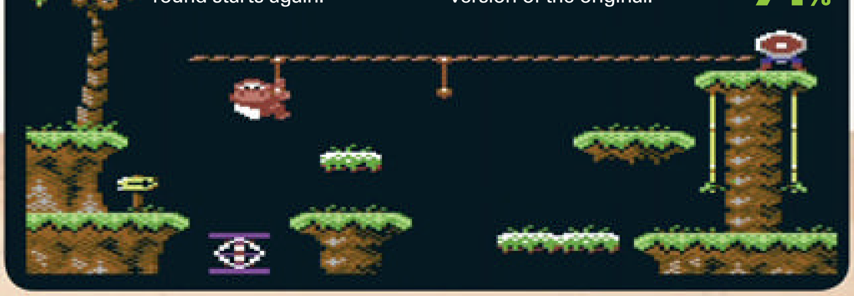


That evil plumber Mario has captured *Donkey Kong* after their previous encounter involving a kidnapped girlfriend and a construction site, locking him away in a cage. But hope isn't lost because DK's young son, the titular Donkey Kong Junior, is about to come to the rescue.

There are four stages for the young monkey to make his way through, with each having a different theme and Junior needs to make his way to the top to proceed to the next. Completing a loop of the four screens sees Donkey Kong freed before he's recaptured and the first round starts again.

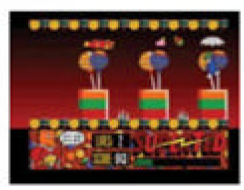
This game was developed by Andreas "Mr. SID" Varga – who was responsible for the excellent C64 port of *Prince Of Persia* and an unofficial *Canabalt* – and is based on the Atari 7800 version, so it is a similarly challenging but overall solid converted version of the original.

91%



SUPERTED: THE SEARCH FOR SPOT

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE AMIGA » **DEVELOPER:** MIKAEL "HIPOONIOS" PERSSON
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/SUPERTED-AMIGA » **PRICE:** FREE



» [Amiga] Geronimo!

Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No, it's a teddy bear in a onesie! Spotty and his family have been kidnapped by Texas Pete and SuperTed's rescue mission sees him flying through horizontally scrolling landscapes, destroying Pete's minions with whatever comes to hand. There's a range of nasties to blast – some like the falling Lemmings are taken from the Amiga's history rather than the TV series – and any contact with them will drain SuperTed's energy.

This is a simple scrolling blaster with some okay action, but it does feel stodgy even when running on a beefed up Amiga. It ideally needs a better framerate and some original in-game graphics.

61%

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 3**, a bargain if ever there was one





STAR LETTER

BRING OUT YOUR DEAD

Hi **Retro Gamer,**

Forgive me, for I am about to rant. I bought my son an Xbox One for Christmas, and after a couple of days of being unable to play it because he couldn't get online (no, that's not the rant) he started playing the games he'd got – mostly first-person shooters. He struggled to get to grips with them and died a lot, but it didn't seem to hold him back much.

So I ask you, why doesn't death matter anymore? If you got killed in the games we grew up with, you'd go back to the start of the level, or if you lost all your lives right back to the start of a game. Infinite lives used to be a cheat, but today it seems to be standard. Is it just the developers trying to hurry people through the games so they'll buy the next one, or has something bigger changed? My son seems okay with it, but I'd feel really ripped off if I'd bought those games

Geoff Markham



» [Arcade] Of course, sometimes death came rather too frequently, as in *Ghouls 'N Ghosts*.

We're with you on this one Geoff – things *have* changed. The lives system was most at home in arcades, but also made sense in the early days of home gaming, when games were typically shorter and used difficulty to provide longevity. Unfortunately many developers now see it as being a slightly anachronistic and frustrating way of doing things, and have been electing to drop it ever since the early PS2 days – if we recall, *Ratchet & Clank* was one of the first high profile games to do it.

That said, not all new games treat death so lightly, as many roguelikes feature permanent death. And while game design has changed, that's just a good non-nostalgic reason to enjoy retro games – as games evolve, they offer something different from the current trends.

POSTER BOY

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

While clearing the loft in readiness for moving house recently, I found an old box I had forgotten about. It contained genuine posters from my old C64 and Amiga days including the likes of *Uridium*, *Zoids*, *Strider* and my personal favourite of the bunch, *Laser Squad*.

These had been given away free during my regular visits to the local computer game store, Gemsoft. They were often behind the counter and staff would ask visitors if they would like a free poster – whether they purchased something or not!

There was a time when things like free posters were readily distributed to stores but sadly, such courtesy is now absent from the modern games industry. How times change, and not always for the better!

D O'Connor

Indeed, it does seem that at some point, publishers realised that putting posters and other similar promotional items in the box would allow them to promote games as collectors' editions and charge a little bit more money for them.

However, while they may not be freely given to customers anymore, we can't say that in-store promotional materials are dead and gone – a few months back, stores were inconvenienced by an enormous cardboard archway for *Call Of Duty: Advanced Warfare*. As the promotional display was placed near the tills and used a gigantic amount of floor space, the wretched thing wound up congesting that part of the store and causing total chaos.

» As Adam points out, if your collection doesn't already look like this, it's hard to know where to get retro games.



MAKE YOUR PLAY

Hi **RG**,

After reading the magazine for a while now, my list of games to play has become exponentially longer! However, most of the time I don't know how to achieve this without owning every console ever. It would be good to see brief coverage at the end of features (where relevant) of how I can legally play these classic games today, e.g. are they available on GOG/Steam, have they been re-released, maybe on iOS or Android, or are they included in retro compilations for modern consoles?

There are so many great, classic games out there but I am unable to experience a lot of them via original hardware so need to know where I can get hold of them.

Todd "The Trashman" Clarke

That's a good point, Adam – we're good at documenting the original availability of the games we cover, but do sometimes neglect current ways to acquire them. We certainly don't mean to do a disservice to the publishers that work hard to keep retro games available, as they provide a vital service to fans. We'll look to address this in the future, as we're aware that few people have the space for all of the machines we cover!

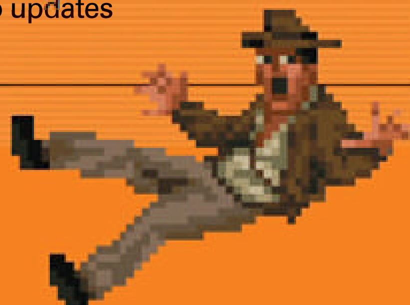
SPLATTER CHAT

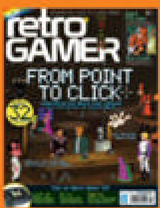
Hello **Retro Gamer,**

I have been a reader of your magazine for a couple of years now and I enjoy reading every issue you guys make. I'm 31 years old, but have been playing video games ever since the Amiga 500 with my first ever game *Onslaught*, as well and *Rock 'N Roll* and *Pinball Dreams*. I still own a couple of retro consoles like the NES and

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CONTACT US

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Email: retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

» [Arcade] The original *Splatterhouse* was only converted to popular Japanese platforms such as the PC Engine.



SNES I just wanted to write to you guys and ask if you would consider doing a review of *Splatterhouse*. This is one of my favourite games from back in the day and I would love to see you guys review it and put it in the mag.

Dean Russell

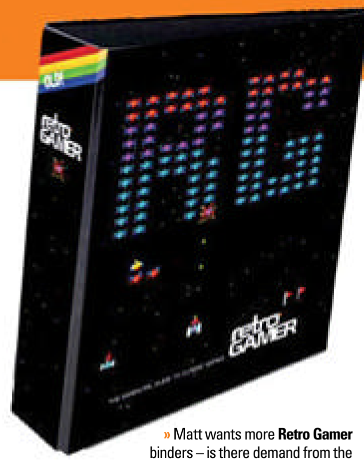
Thank you for the kind words about the magazine, Dean! You'll be pleased to know that we love *Splatterhouse* too and we are looking at doing a feature on it – it might take a little time to come to fruition, but we have been discussing how to do such a feature so rest assured, it's very much on our list of future plans.

IN A BIND

Hi Darran

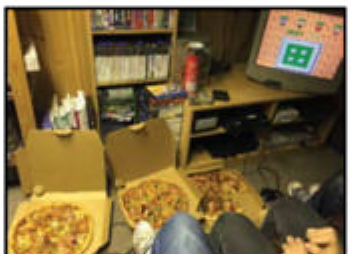
Firstly, thanks for a consistent, great publication each month. It's the only thing that comes close to the excitement of awaiting a release of *Zzap!*. Now, how about binders again? I've got every issue since the original launch and am just about out of binder space. I'm sure there's 3rd party options – I haven't looked yet – but it wouldn't be the same! Anyway – happy new year, and keep up the good work.

Matt Dickerson



» Matt wants more **Retro Gamer** binders – is there demand from the rest of the retro community?

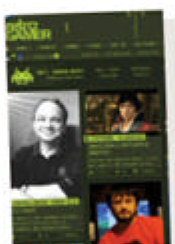
Many thanks for continuing to read the magazine, Matt. We have actually got too few binders to fit our very own complete collection, so we understand the problem that you are currently facing. We are not sure whether there's going to be another run of binders just yet, but rest assured that if it does come to pass, we won't forget to mention them in the magazine. In the meantime, if any other readers would like to see binders available again, let us know via the usual methods and we will see what we can do.



DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

The Retro Shed

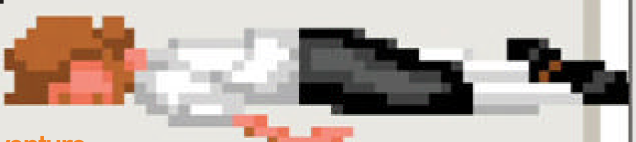
How many people can fit in Darran's shed? That was the question we sought to answer with a night of retro gaming, with *Play's* Luke Albigés joining the Retro Gamer team for lots of pizza and some four-player mayhem on *Micro Machines 2*, *Mega Bomberman* and *Power Stone 2*.



From the forum

» www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…



Your favourite point-and-click adventure

Mancman
Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade. One of my all time favorite films and because it stayed true to the storyline of the film, you truly felt like you were the man in the hat!

ArchaicKoala
Tough call! For me it's between *Broken Sword 2* and Beneath A Steel Sky… The latter probably edges it although I played *Broken Sword 2* first.

Oblisky
Having gone down the console route over the years, I've not played most of the games mentioned on here, therefore the *Broken Sword* series is on obvious choice for me. It's hard to pick out any as my favourite as I enjoyed the first three equally.

joefish
Riven (*Myst II*) was the first one to really hook me. I'd tried it on the PlayStation and couldn't get into it, then years later tried it on the PC – with a few hints for the really insane bits – and just thought it was fantastic.

PaulEMoz
I watched my wife play them more than actually playing them myself. The one I most enjoyed watching her play was *Syberia*. That said, I really enjoyed *Blade Runner*. That was well done.

HalcyonDaze00
Monkey Island 1 & *2* are genuine all time classic games, they are by far the best of the genre.

Hiro
My vote goes to *Zak McRacken And The Alien Mindbenders*, another Lucasfilm masterpiece. Great humour, wacky story and characters, tons of locations and a fantastic packaging too.

necronom
Discworld Noir is a superbly written adventure with an excellently dark atmosphere. It doesn't try too hard to be funny like its two predecessors did and as a result winds up being, well, funny.

Mayhem
Day Of The Tentacle all the way, it was the game I saw running in my local computer shop that made me wish I had a PC with soundcard and CD drive.

jdanddiet
Blade Runner – moody, atmospheric and a loving homage to the film. And great graphics.

TheDude18
Played quite a few adventure games in the past – never managed to complete one though! The one I'd like to revisit though would be *Full Throttle*.

retro GAMER

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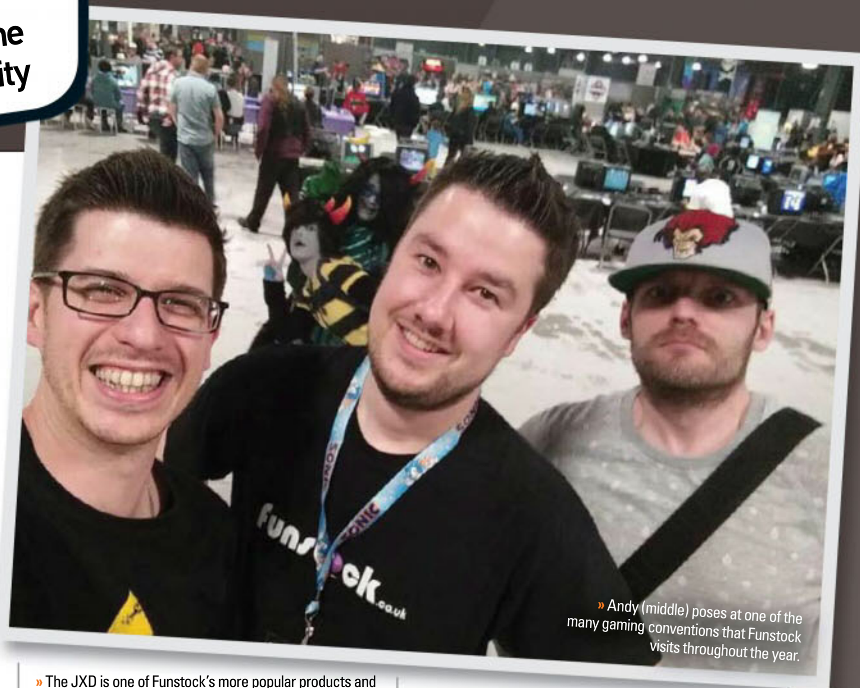
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Funstock

This month we decided to catch up with Andy Pearson and discover the plans he has in place for popular website, Funstock



» Andy (middle) poses at one of the many gaming conventions that Funstock visits throughout the year.

Why did you set Funstock set up?
I grew up with SEGA Mega Drive and Super Nintendo and I've always been a huge fan of retro gaming because of that. I always wanted to find a way to bring my love of retro gaming into my work and Funstock seemed the perfect way to do that.

How long have you been a gamer and what's your favourite game and what is your favourite system?
I've been a gamer for 20+ years and my favourite system was the SEGA Mega Drive. My favourite game ever is *Micro Machines* – I tend to play mainly multiplayer games and this is without a doubt the most fun game to play when you are in a group.

What products does Funstock specialise in?
We specialise in "new ways to play old games". We sell officially licensed hardware with built-in games and have a range of both home and handheld consoles. We also specialise in related merchandise with exclusive ranges and product lines that nobody else is able to offer.

Why do you think retro games remain so popular?
I think they remain popular, as they're still (in my opinion) the best games. It's also a lot more affordable. I've recently got into collecting games (thanks to my love of the Retron 5) and I'm able to pick up stacks of games for the price of one current-gen game!

What challenges do you face?
The main challenge with being an online retailer is putting a face to the brand. That's why we attend top retro events in the country, so we can meet our customers in person. It also gives us a chance to get people 'hands on' with our products so they can make their own opinions on them as well.

What tend to be your most popular selling items on the website?
Our exclusive products and anything we have sourced ourselves. We work very hard to be the first to stock the newest and most exciting products and that's what keeps us in front of the competition.

» The JXD is one of Funstock's more popular products and is able to run a variety of different emulators.



"We work very hard to be the first to stock the newest and most exciting products"
Andy Pearson on keeping ahead of the competition

What sets Funstock apart from similar websites?
Our exclusive ranges. We work very hard to secure exclusive deals for the best new products and it's something we will be continuing to do in 2015 and onwards.

What plans do you have for 2015?
We have already secured (but not announced) several new exclusive products that will be releasing in 2015. Our European sites will also be launching throughout 2015 (with www.Funstock.fr being the first). We are also working on some other major projects! *



» Funstock was involved with the recent Classic Gaming Championships that ran last year.





» Funstock is one of the few online shops in the UK that sells the recently released Retron 5.

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ENDGAME



GEMFIRE

» This strategy war game is often overlooked today bur it's something of a forgotten classic. With the feuding clans of Ishmeria unified through conquest, your hero has one last task: defeat the fire dragon. Let's join Loryn of the Divas' family in his moment of triumph…



01

» The fire dragon has been beaten, and is once again sealed away as the ruby in the crown, Gemfire! That was no easy task to achieve, either – Loryn has a terrible starting position and represents possibly the hardest scenario in the game.



02

» Despite being freed from the tower, Robyn isn't too happy with herself. The princess regrets the act of dismantling Gemfire due to the war it caused, despite the fact that her dad was a terrible dictator who brought the kingdom to ruin.



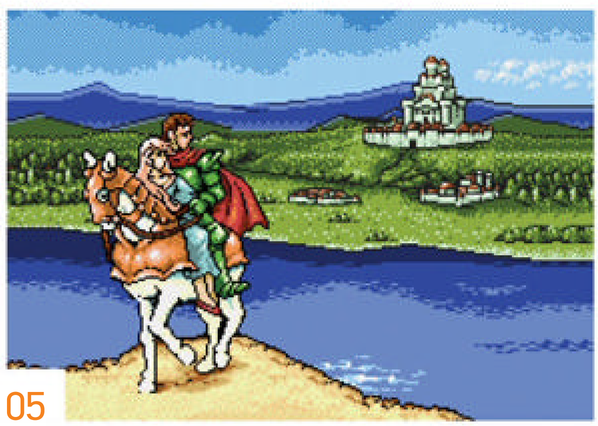
03

» Loryn doesn't mind – he has done rather well out of it all, having usurped the crown in the process of taking down that pesky dragon. A new era has dawned, and it's time for Robyn to get involved in all of the celebrations.



04

» Loryn's defeated a big dragon, got the girl and united a nation, so his approval ratings are sky-high. We're not sure why this data is being collected, as he attained his power through bloody conquest and isn't likely to turn it over democratically. Surely pollsters have something better to do?



05

» Together, Robyn and Loryn (represented in this screenshot by his brown-haired stunt double) ride off in search of peace and happiness. Unfortunately, both of them instead get utterly lost in the woods and are nowhere to be found by the time the Japan-only sequel *Royal Blood II* is released.

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